A Collaborative Effort Towards Social Change: Understanding Media's Influence on African American Fathers of Young Children

Lindsey Wilson

A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington
2018

Reading Committee:
Holly Schindler, Chair
Carmen Gonzalez
Soojin Oh Park

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

College of Education

University of Washington

Abstract

A Collaborative Effort Towards Social Change: Understanding Media's Influence on African American Fathers of Young Children

Lindsey Wilson

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Holly Schindler
College of Education

African American family literature has confirmed the active role Black fathers play in their families and communities. Yet, African American fathers have historically been portrayed in unfavorable manners through a deficit-based narrative. Frequently described as "absent," "deadbeats," "nonresidential," or "irresponsible," these fathers' voices are rarely brought to the table. Media has been said to contribute to this crisis through its stereotypical images; yet, little is known about the effects that media has on these Black fathers' roles. Through three qualitative, semi-structured focus groups, this study explores the messages that Black fathers have received about themselves from televised media (television shows, news channels, sitcoms, movies, and commercials). Results suggest that Black fathers believe that media in less likely to portray them positively and more likely to portray them in negative or stereotypical ways. Acknowledging that media presents an incomplete picture of Black fatherhood, fathers reported that their relationships with their own fathers, social fathers, life experiences, and navigating barriers have been key factors in understanding their roles. Finally, participants desired for media to portray them for who they truly were, active Black fathers who were stable in their families, engaged in their communities, and willing to make sacrifices for their children.

Keywords: fathers, media, race, fatherhood, African American, television, representation

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the one who has faithfully led me through this journey specifically during the rough patches, the one who has never put more on me than I could handle, the one who has always watched over me, kept me safe and healthy while guiding me through his wisdom. Everything I have done and continue to do would not be possible without my Heavenly Father to which I am forever indebted. Thank you, God, for believing in me and creating this path as I continue to seek the purpose you have for my life. I would also like to thank my church for keeping me grounded and reminding me that this too shall pass while refocusing all of my stress and struggles on the bigger picture. Without you Lord there is no me.

To my dissertation committee, Dr. Holly Schindler, Dr. Geneva Gay, Dr. Carmen Gonzalez, Dr. Soojin Oh Park, and Dr. William Vesneski, thank you all for pushing me to find my voice while encouraging me to never lose sight on why my work is crucial. Getting to this point of my academic journey would not have been possible without all of your encouragement and recommendations. Dr. Schindler, thank you for believing in me as a scholar from day one, your support, feedback, and mentorship allowed me to think outside of the bounds of traditional academy. My research would not have been fulfilled without your expertise and commitment to me.

To my parents, who continuously support me in every venture I embark on. Without knowing what we were getting into four years ago, mother you jumped right in with a paddle to help me row into this day. There are not enough words to thank you for always having my back and trying to find a solution to every challenge. To my stepfather, thank you for your support throughout the years, I recognize that as I got older my projects seemed to get a little harder. Going from building fireplaces out of clay to finalizing a dissertation, your insight, feedback, and

suggestions during this process were crucial to ensuring that the work completed stayed true to our community. To my father thank you for all of your encouragement and instilling the drive in me to accomplish whatever I set my mind to.

To my grandmother who prayed over me every day during this process, who was willing to compromise our daily conversations to allow me to focus on trying to get finish. I appreciate you taking the time to listen and learn about my journey every step of the way. Your calls were always inspiring and your harsh reminders to take care of myself first was much needed. I have been blessed to have you on this journey with me. To my grandfather who passed prior to this journey but is one of the main reason I do the work that I do, I know that you are looking down and I hope that I have made you proud.

To my best friend, you have always been one of my number one cheerleaders. I appreciate your support and the ways that you somehow motivate me to keep going, right when I am ready to throw in the towel. You have not only served as my friend but my counselor for the last four years. Thank you!

To my fiancé, you have been my rock during the hardest moments of this journey. You were calm during all of my turbulence and dedicated to helping me find my center and face challenges that I thought defeated me. Thank you for your support and being you.

Without the prayers, support, and encouragement of so many others this dream of completing a doctoral degree would not have been attained. From my GO-MAP team, to all of my family, friends, and other peers this degree does not solely belong to me. Instead it belongs to everyone who has blessed me with their words of wisdom, insight, and other gems during this process. While we all get our fair share of the degree, I call dibs on the Dr. in front of my name!

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Approximately 97% of Americans have at least one television in their homes, and they spend approximately 4 hours per day watching it. Therefore, broadcasted television is increasingly considered a probable source of information for parents (Hinckley et al., 2007; Sanders, 2015). This is especially true for fathers, who (1) have deemed television to be a useful delivery method for parenting programs, and (2) may be more susceptible to televised media messages due to the lack of fathering socialization that they experienced as children (Frank et al., 2015; Morawska et al., 2011; Metzler et al., 2012; Patty & Ward, 2016). Broader research has shown that mass media is a powerful tool with the capability to exert control over its audience. For example, literature suggests that media contributes to the violence, sexual assault, body image issues, and racism within our society (Duminica & Popescu, 2012; Löwstedt & Mboti, 2017; Macnamara, 2003).

These findings have generated a number of mass communication theories surrounding the effects of media. One theory argues that media is an instrument used by the elite to manipulate the public's opinions, while another claims that media helps people learn *what* to think about rather than *how* to think (Macnamara, 2003). Regardless of the intention of media, it is clear that it can influence the ways in which individuals perceive themselves and others. Yet, there are clear gaps in the existing work in this area. The limited literature that exists related to fathers and media has revealed that the depiction of fathers in mass media (e.g., commercials, advertisements, and television) can be influential to the understanding of their role, self-perception, and how others perceive them (Brown, 2015; Patty & Ward, 2016). However, research to date has focused on fathers' socioeconomic statuses, disregarding the ways that media's depictions can influence fathers of color, in particular African American fathers. As

these fathers encounter unique challenges with discrimination, oppression, stereotypes and a dominant cultural storyline that is solely driven from a deficit perspective, it is critical to understand the messages Black fathers receive about themselves from broadcasted media content. In addition, it is important to understand the ways such depictions align or misalign with fathers' daily parenting practices. Finally, it is important to learn more about key factors that have contributed to the ways that Black fathers have made meaning out of their roles.

The significance of a father's role has reached a new peak over the past two decades, with a growing emphasis placed on how important it is for fathers to provide for their children beyond financial means. The definition of an "involved father" has placed an increasing emphasis on fathers' accessibility and engagement. This has created new dilemmas for African American fathers, who have historically been one of the largest non-residential populations and have often been erroneously labeled "deadbeat" dads or "absent fathers" (Conner & White, 2007; Coles & Green, 2010; Mincy, 2006). Beginning in the 1990s and stemming from political leaders, researchers, and the media at large, the "absence" of African American fathers quickly became the blame for many social problems, including children's misbehaviors, high unemployment rates, increases in crime, and the drug epidemic within and outside of their communities (Building Blocks, 2004; Clinton, 1995; Howard, 2006). The image of the absent African American father became a huge threat to society, yet disregarded many uncomfortable influential factors that affected their residential status, factors that fathers had little to no control over. These factors included both policies and grave societal injustices, such as the Welfare Reform act, mass incarceration, the historic effects of slavery, and today, some would speculate, the large number of unjust killings by law enforcement (Coates, 2015; Embrick, 2015; Moore et al., 2017; Roy, 1999; Western & Wilderman; 2009). The "absent father" label has also

historically discredited the actual amount of involvement nonresidential fathers have had with their children, while overlooking residential fathers' experiences altogether. Such omission has neglected the insider perspective of Black fatherhood, generating a restricted perception of what it means to be a Black father. The "absent" father label continues to depict these fathers in a box where they are mostly viewed in relation to their nonresidential status and/or their perceived inability to take care of their children. This depiction discounts the incredible attributes that these fathers offer their young children. The tainted perspective is reinforced through limited representations within research and the media, hence feeding back into the myth of the "absent" Black father.

Apart from low-income nonresidential fathers, African American fathers continue to be an underrepresented and unstudied population, creating a large knowledge gap within the fatherhood field (Caldwell et al., 2011; Coles & Green, 2010; Johnson & Young, 2016). This study aims to fulfill a segment of this gap by learning more about Black fatherhood from an insider's perspective, while being mindful of the ways that these fathers perceive media's representation of them and their roles as fathers. For this study, media is operationally defined as any broadcasted televised content, which includes movies, commercials, sitcoms, or other news outlets. Furthermore, this study adopts Merton's (1972) definition of insiders, to be defined as members of a specified group, which in this case are African American fathers. Outsiders are defined as non-group members, specifically denoted in this study as other societal members unless otherwise noted. This study builds on existing literature by answering the following three research questions:

1. What messages do African American fathers receive about themselves through televised media?

2. What are some key factors that have influenced Black fathers' understanding of their fatherly role?
3. What qualities do African American fathers desire that broadcasted media present about their experiences as Black fathers?

This study specifically focuses on Black fathers of young children for two particular reasons. First, a large body of early childhood literature suggests that parents are their children's first and most important teachers (A/Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, 2014.) Given that a vast majority of child development occurs within the first five years of life, their knowledge is typically generated in informal learning environments and supported by their parents (Banks et al., 2007). Therefore, understanding fathers of young children is critical to the development of children. Secondly, early childhood is a time when fathers themselves are taking on new roles and responsibilities, and may be particularly inclined to reflect on their identity as fathers.

Furthermore, with all the encouragement, support, and recognition that fathers now receive for the critical role they play in their children's development, it is essential to understand African American fathers beyond the overly studied low-income nonresidential stereotypical dad (Conner & White; 2007; Fleck et al., 2013; Gadsden, 2003; Young & Johnson, 2016). How are African American fathers making sense of their fatherly roles, and in what ways do their daily lived experiences differ from the "absent" or negative narratives? With such information, a more complete story can be told about Black fatherhood, not only challenging the current mainstream narrative but also shedding light on the diverse array of fathers within the Black community. This information can provide outsiders with data to better support and celebrate these fathers.

Since this study focuses on fathers with young children, findings also have the potential to provide early childhood professionals with a fresh perspective on who these fathers are and the strengths they encompass, which is essential to building a bridge between African American fathers and early learning programs. Given the clear importance of parental interactions in supporting the development of children birth to five, it is no surprise that child development programs and organizations are promoting father involvement now more than ever before (Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, 2014; Banks et al., 2007; Cowan, Cowan, & Knox, 2010; Lamb, 2000). Many of these programs are seeking more information on how to better engage and support African American men.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Though no research to date has specifically examined African American fathers' interactions with media content, a variety of interrelated but separate literatures have informed this study. Below, I review literature on African American fathers' roles from an insider's perspective, through which I explore research on Black fathers' engagement with and accessibility to their young children. I follow the insiders review by exploring literature from an outsider's perspective, investigating the ways that Black men and fathers are portrayed in the media and viewed by a large segment of society. Having recognized the discourse between the insiders' and outsiders' perspectives, I will close this chapter by examining the ways that African American fathers negotiate their two separate worlds by emphasizing their insider perspective and acknowledging their agency.

Insider view of African American Fathers

Residential fathers or not, these men are present. Recently we have seen studies highlighting the active role Black fathers play in their children's lives, with studies suggesting

that nonresidential fathers see their children several times a week despite their living arrangements (Reynolds, 2009; Smith et al, 2005). Furthermore, fathers have reported spending just as much or more time with their children as residential fathers engaging in caretaking activities (Brown, 2014; Leavell et al., 2011). For instance, Leavell et al. (2011) interviewed 426 African American, Latino, and White fathers and found that, despite African American fathers being less likely to be married or reside with their child's mother in the study, they were more likely to participate in caregiving activities when compared to their study counterparts. Additionally, research has revealed that African American fathers are engaged in higher levels of visiting activities. In particular, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that African American fathers are more involved in their children's daily life than any other father from various racial groups (Jones & Mosher, 2013). Simultaneously, these nonresidential fathers have had active presences within their communities, often joining collective efforts to create a brighter future for their children. For example, Reynolds (2009) interviewed 10 Black nonresidential fathers and found that one of the fathers volunteered in a neighborhood gun control initiative, as he was concerned about the impact of guns on his young son's future. In this same study, another father reported joining a community health organization after his nephew was diagnosed with childhood leukemia. This emerging research demonstrates the responsibility, connection, and drive that these fathers exhibit both to being present in their children's lives as well as the environments that may influence their children's upbringings.

Interviews of Black fathers regularly demonstrate the need that these men feel to be a part of their children's lives. Further, Black nonresidential fathers consistently express how their residential status and income do not define their love or desire to be a part of their children's lives. In spite of these findings, outsiders continue to associate absenteeism with Black

fatherhood. Acknowledging the restrictions that such stereotypes generate for Black fathers, it is not uncommon for them to reject these incorrect stereotypes. For example, one non-residential Black father reported:

> Everyone thinks we [Black fathers] don't care about our children; we just have them, leave them and move on. I want to say to everyone "we're not all like that, open your eyes and you'll see plenty of… good [fathers], who are trying to be there for their [children], but no one is interested in what we have to say, so the stereotypes remain." (Reynolds, 2009 p. 17)

As suggested in the insert above, wrongful assumptions promote an inaccurate monolithic conception of Black fatherhood that continues to set nonresidential fathers up to be stereotyped, while disregarding the larger population of African American fathers who are married, reside with their children, and/ or are deeply involved with caring for their children.

Per the U.S. Census Bureau (2004), over half of the African American population has been married, and according to the CDC, about 2.5 million Black fathers live in the home with their children, while 1.7 Black fathers do not (Blow, 2015; CDC, 2013). In short, the norm for these fathers is to reside with their children and/ or be married even though outsiders have created and perpetuated a different narrative. The overwhelming misguided focus on Black fathers' household arrangements—in particular nonresidential fathers—has created a platform where Black fathers' positive characteristics and attributes continue to be overshadowed by their non-residential or low-income socioeconomic status (Fagan & Barnett, 2013; Young & Johnson). This leaves little to be known about the diverse assortment of Black fathers, which can reinforce the distorted "absent" father stereotype. Recognizing that residential status does not imply that fathers are unwilling to take care of their children or that they are inactive in their

child's life, the remainder of this section will examine the strengths and attributes of Black fathers in a new light, omitting mention of their residential or income status. My hope is that this will allow the spotlight to shine on African American fathers' strengths without caveats.

Egalitarian role. As attested by much of the African American family literature, children remain the heart of Black families (Lynch et al., 2011; McAdoo, 2007). Despite the limited scope of research focused on Black fathers, we know that they often employ an egalitarian approach to raising their children (Cazenave. 1979; McAdoo & McAdoo, 1997; Threlfall, 2013). Embracing one of the seven African-Centered foundational values—Ujima (collective work and responsibility)—these fathers continue to report engaging in a team approach to nurturing their children (Karrenga, 1993; Mirande, 1991). Practicing flexibility in their parenting styles, the roles of Black fathers regularly overlap the roles of mothers. In other words, these fathers are not afraid to step right in and contribute collectively to household chores and duties, child care tasks, helping with school, child rearing decisions, and other child socializing activities (McAdoo & McAdoo, 1997; McAdoo, 1986; Threlfall, 2013). Contrary to the outsiders' belief, these men persistently report being both a provider and nurturer as their primary fatherly roles (Paschal, Lewis-Moss, Hsiao, 2010; Threlfall, 2013). Congruent with that notion, Paschal et al. (2010) interviewed 30 Black teenage fathers to gain a better understanding on how they define their roles. One finding was that fathers say their roles as parents include (1) providing for their children financially and through other tangible means and (2) "being there" for their children. Being there for children physically, emotionally, and in other nurturing ways is a value embodied by many African American fathers. These men often convey a sense of pride surrounding their ability to be there to take care of their children and frequently reference

their relationship with their own fathers as influential to their desire to do so (Paschal, Lewis-Moss, Hsiao, 2010).

Other core values of the African American culture are spirituality, improvisation, resilience, and again connectedness to others within the community. These core values have led some scholars to claim that Black fathers "father" in very distinctive ways that the traditional fatherhood definition does not take into consideration (Cooper, 2015; McAdoo, 2007). For example, the term social fathering, which includes other men such as uncles, godfathers, brothers, cousins, stepfathers, or ministers in a child's life who take on a fatherly role, has been applied to describe African American fathers. Social fathering has a huge presence in the Black community, suggesting that a father's role can extend beyond that of a biological father, and that fathering can take a village (Conner & White, 2007; Jayakody & Kalil, 2002). Another example concerns outsiders' perspective on African American fathers' authoritative parenting approach. While the dominant culture has criticized authoritative parenting, deeming it as harsh and cruel, many African Americans—particularly Black fathers—have viewed it as a protective measure for their children. Setting strong boundaries for their children is believed to set them up for success against the mean cold outside world (Coates, 2015; King, 2015). Ta-Nehisi Coates, author of "*Between the World and Me*", a published book formatted as a letter to his teenage son, explicitly addressed his family's generational custom of fear surrounding the protection of their children. In his book, he stated that his father often spanked him out of anxiety that he would lose his son through the means of racially unjust societal inequalities. Coates then went on to say that he would practice similarly harsh discipline practices with his son as a means to keep his Black body safe. Many of these cultural nuances continue to go unstudied because the current literature is engrossed with "fixing" these fathers to reflect the standards of dominant culture

rather than learning more about their unique experiences. Such practices have led to limiting resources for Black fathers that focus on very dominant culturally driven solutions, like Responsible Fathering Programs, which have been largely centered around encouraging fathers to marry.

Historically, mainstream society has focused on detrimental quantitative statistics that have often signified that there was a crisis within the Black community that needed to be fixed. For instance, in 2011 the Pew Research Center released a study that indicated 72 percent of Black children were born to unwed parents, conveying that there was a "catastrophe" in the Black community. Following the Pew study, several interventions were set into place, without fully understanding the stories behind the numbers (Pew Research Center, 2014). Stacia Brown (2014) addressed the damage triggered by the statistics in her article "The Untold Story of Black Fatherhood," where she suggested that relinquishing such numbers without the complete story can generate the assumption that every one of those unwed children was fatherless, which was not the case. Despite this not being the case, individuals within the media immediately used their platform to address what they now perceived as a crisis in the Black community. For example, Don Lemon, an African American CNN anchor at the time addressed the issue by saying:

> Just because you can have a baby, it doesn't mean you should. Especially without planning for one or getting married first. More than 72 percent of children in the African-American community are born out of wedlock. That means absent fathers. And the studies show that lack of a male role model is an express train right to prison and the cycle continues.

This is a prime example of the harmful effects of studies that disregard the cultural relevance of Black families, in particular the critical voices of the fathers within the

communities. Without incorporating these crucial voices, we continue to run the risk of perpetuating the "absent" Black father narrative while disregarding the ways that racism contributes to these fathers' challenges. Broadcasted televised media has been a leading example of this, as it continues to fed into the deficit narrative about these fathers from an outsider's perspective, while disregarding the voices of Black fathers.

Media as an Outsider's Perspective of African American Fathers

The idea that media can impact viewers is not a new concept; there has been a great deal of research demonstrating the influence that it has had on body images, child development, violence, politics, sexism, and racism (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012; Gentile et al., 2011; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008; Quick & Byrd-Bredbenner, 2013). For example, movies, commercials, sitcoms, and magazines have all been shown to have a negative effect on some women's self-esteem as they compare themselves to slender images found within the media. Supporting literature has also found that media can create fear among its viewers and generate or confirm negative stereotypes about specific populations based on gender, race, or religion (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995; Wilcox & Laird, 2000). For instance, Mastro and Tropp (2004) found that exposure to stereotypical portrayals of African American individuals in the media reinforced the prejudicial beliefs of the participants. This confirmation then overshadowed any potential positive interactions that viewers may have had with that population.

With the array of well-cited micro-level media effects theories—models that base their observations and conclusions on individual users instead of large groups—it is clear that each of the 11 models conceptualize the media effects process differently. For example, the two-step flow theory (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948) argues that the effects of media are indirect and established through the personal opinions of leaders, while the knowledge gap theory (Tichenor et al., 1970)

claims media provides opportunities to fill knowledge gaps within U.S. society. Finally, Entman's (1993) framing theory suggests that the media is used to highlight topics to which viewers should pay closer attention. In spite of the discourse among the various theories, their commonality is the influence media has on its audience, which has been proven to even occur subconsciously (Brown, 2015; Kahenman, 2011).

Supporting literature has shown that there are biases associated with the media. In particular, audience members remember negative images to which they are exposed more readily than positive images, also known as availability biases. For instance, if a viewer has watched two separate portrayals of an African American father, they are more likely to remember the negative image over the positive image. In addition, literature has revealed that individuals tend to seek and focus on images that will confirm their current view while ignoring contradictory images, a concept referred to as confirmation bias (Brown, 2015; Frost, 2015). In other words, confirmation bias suggests that viewers may look or tend to remember images that confirm negative stereotypes of a population. While both biases are problematic in U.S. society in general, these biases create unique challenges for African American fathers who are often portrayed from a deficit perspective both as fathers and as men.

African American men, stereotypes, and media. Scholars have noted that the historic and current unique challenges that African American men face are the worst and most persistent form of oppression within the United States (Welch, 2007). The mainstream outsider narrative of African American men as violent criminals has serious implications for their mental, physical, and emotional well-being. Combating stereotypes is a daily task for some African American men who seek to offset the negative portrayals of them by constantly smiling, being mindful of their "Black body," dressing conservatively and speaking in certain tones (Texeira, 2006; Coates,

2015). In 2016, the #100blackmeninsuits challenge was established, where young Black men dressed in suits came together to pray as a means to promote awareness for African American men and fight the negative footage of Black men in the media (Moton, 2016). At that time the president of Baylor NAACP, Reginald Singletary, explained, "The point of this challenge is not only just to take a picture and not only just to be something for one day but to really break stereotypes and show the unity amongst Black men."

This modest demonstration is just one of the many ways African American males attempt to battle the disparaging stereotypes of them within U.S. society. Melissa Harris Lacewell and other scholars have argued that despite the additional stress that comes with being stereotyped, learning to adapt is at the heart of being a Black American male because it is critical to employment, freedom, and life (Texeira, 2006). Stereotypical images displayed through televised media confirm the fallacy that these men are a threat to society, feeding into media's biases and increasing the fear of these men in others. In addition, these distorted images have provided some Whites with justification for the violence committed against brown and Black bodies by the police and the criminal justice system as a whole, almost as if these individuals deserve what comes their way because they are presented as criminals through the media (Embrick, 2015).

Katheryn Russell (1998) supported the notion that media has harmful effects on Black Americans as her work explored racial hoaxes—when an individual lies about a crime and blames it on another person solely based on their race—and found that there is a disproportionate rate of African American males intentionally being blamed for crimes they did not commit, as a result of their skin color (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000). Russell goes further and blames the media for continuing to use stereotypical photos that feed into the labels of these men:

> The public representation of Blackness is a distorted one. The media as well as the academic community are largely responsible for this caricature. Blacks are routinely portrayed as marginal, deviant members of society. The exceptions to these portrayals have been insufficient to alter the public's perception. These deeply rooted images are clearly holdovers from slavery (p.149).

Among the 67 racial hoaxes found over a course of nine years, 70% of the lies included White individuals fabricating crimes against Blacks, which some scholars reported being a result of the racist media in the United States (Diuguid & Rivers, 2000). Other scholars and advocacy groups have challenged media's negative representation of the African American population on television. While some may argue that there has been a shift in the images portrayed, many are still concerned about the impact that these negative portrayals have on audience members (Mastro & Tropp, 2004). In particular, these stereotypical images not only impact outside groups but also the group being stereotyped. One of the most infamous examples of this is the Clark and Clark (1940) Doll Test, which demonstrated the ill effects of stereotyping within the United States and the influence it had on children's self-perception, specifically pertaining to race. The results of the study verified that segregation within schools distorted the minds of young Black children, which instilled internalized stereotypes and racism, causing them to prefer playing with a doll that represented a White baby over dolls who looked like them. Replications of the original study have demonstrated similar results (Harpalani et al., 2013; Powell-Hopson & Hopson, 1988).

In a recent study, African American college students from three separate universities reported that stereotypes and the threat of fulfilling them were barriers to academic achievement (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). In addition, supporting literature demonstrated the ways that

stereotypes of African American men have a negative effect on their social relationships, health, wealth, and the ways that others perceive them. In spite of these connections, little is known about the influence that media's representation has specifically on African American fathers, who are often portrayed in very narrow stereotypical ways (Bethea, 1995; Gullmun, 2002).

African American fathers, stereotypes, and media. Similar to depictions in the media, African American fathers are rarely depicted as active or present in research. With many studies seeking to understand these fathers in low-income and nonresidential capacities, there are large research gaps in the field, causing scholars to criticize the restricted information surrounding African American fathers, their parenting practices, and their experiences (Coles & Green, 2010; Conner & White, 2005; Edin & Nelson, 2013; Johnson & Young, 2016). With little to no data on middle class, married, single, or gay African American fathers, studies have assumed that some of these fathers' parent in similar ways to middle class White dads (Johnson & Young, 2016). Such practices reinforce negative stereotypes, which has led to scholars implying that the perception of Black fatherhood is so rare it could be an oxymoron (Coles & Green, 2010).

With the historic labels of these fathers being "absent," "nonexistent," or "deadbeats," social science has also neglected to examine the uncomfortable factors that have played a role in Black fathers being out of the home, such as public policies and various systems of oppression within the United States (i.e., welfare reform, mass incarceration). Similar to the African American family literature, it should be unethical to explore Black fatherhood without considering the historical impact that slavery may have had on these dads' roles. While it is essential to know the lingering impact that enslaving humans, separating families, restraining economics, and the many other horrendous practices that came along with slavery had on the Black father, certain scholars have made it clear that the myth of the absent fathers should not be

perpetuated by suggesting these effects created a matriarchal family, yet gaining a deeper understanding is needed (McAdoo,1986; Reckley, 2001).

Although physical slavery may no longer exist in the United States, the oppressive ways are still very alive and well for these fathers. When examining public policies such as the federal welfare reform act also referred to as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) that sought to encourage two-parent households, little consideration was given to the historic trauma of the Black family or a true understanding of caregiving or providing activities for fathers across various races or classes (Roy, 1999). With the new reform, which placed more precedence on child support and providing over the actual amount of time and effort that fathers spend with their children, additional policies such as the Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act quickly followed. In a study that described the lived experiences of Black men that were targets of fatherhood and marriage programs, fathers expressed their frustration with the economic model that placed a large emphasis on them only being a financial provider and discrediting the many other roles they played (Jordan-Zachery, 2009). One father said:

> I ain't no deadbeat dad! But I'm dead broke. I don't know why the system thinks that the only way for me to be a good father is through money. What about the time I spend with my children? What about the fact that my family keep the children, without pay? Why can't the system look at all of that? Why am I measure only by money? Women aren't measured this way. (Terrell, 2009)

As articulated here by Terrell and supported by other scholarship, in retrospect, the Deadbeat Parents Punishment Act only focused on the financial means of men and actually criminalized a variety of fathers through the child support system, as any parent who was more than $5000

behind in their child support became a felon, which historically followed the same practices as others in the judicial system that punished Black men to harsher sentences for similar crimes (Baskerville, 2004).

In spite of political officials such as President Clinton at the time, proposing that absent fathers were not a Black, Latino, or White problem but were rather an American problem, he reinforced the theory that Black fathers were in fact the face of the "deadbeat" dads. In his televised live-streamed speech on "Racism in The United States," he stated:

> For those who are neglecting their children, I say it is not too late; your children still need you. To those who only send money in the form of child support, I say keep sending the checks; your kids count on them, and we'll catch you and enforce the law if you stop. [applause and cheers] But the message of this march today–one message is that your money is no replacement for your guiding, your caring, your loving the children you brought into this world –William J. Clinton, "Racism in the United States" (16 October 1995)

While this statement does not seem to be an outright label on Black fathers, the timing of the message speaks volumes. President Clinton chose to address what he deemed to be society's biggest problem - absent fathers - in a speech that spoke to the racism within the United States on the same day as the Million Man March. This was a march that brought millions of African American men together to address various injustices that they faced as a community, with the overall purpose of conveying a different picture of Black men to the world (Morrison & Trimble 2017). On that day, President Clinton reminded fathers it wasn't too late to take care of their children, while also reminding them, if they stop paying child support they would be caught and prosecuted. This created the assumption that Clinton associated the Black man's oppression with

the myth that these men were absent from their children's lives. That said, child support infractions along with several other petty crime infractions interfered with the relationships that fathers had with their children. This was in part due to the lack of financial means that impacted fathers' self-esteem and ability to father. Furthermore, these policies contributed to the large number of African American men taken away from their children due to mass incarceration (Jordan-Zachery, 2009).

Mass incarceration has been a major feature in the 21st century, as the United States of America has had the highest imprisonment rate in the world for years (Kelly, 2015). With over 6.8 million people behind bars, this US epidemic is particularly problematic for African Americans, who are five times more likely than Whites to be incarcerated (NAACP, n.d.). Serving as one of the most serious forms of racial inequities, the criminal justice system has been deemed the "New Jim Crow," as it engages in modern forms of racial control through policies such as the "War on Drugs" and "Stop and Frisk" (Greenawalt, 2014; Mitchell & Caudy, 2015). Alexander (2010) goes as far to make the claim that more African American men are currently involved in the US criminal justice system than were actually enslaved in the 1850s. With an estimated1/3 of African American men between the ages of 20 and 29 in prison and nearly 2 million children missing at least one parent to the system, one can only imagine the number of families affected by the racial inequities surrounding Black men being incarcerated at a much higher rate (Clear, 2007; Kelly, 2015). The funded prison boom within the United States has been correlated with certain political and economic gains, leaving 10.4 percent of Black children to have had a father in prison or jail (Western & Wildeman, 2009). These statistics have not taken into consideration the challenges these fathers face once they are released surrounding employment, relationships with family, children, or the child's mother. Beyond the massive

number of African American fathers who are involuntary out of the homes of their children as a result of mass incarceration, other fathers have been permanently taken away as result of the "justice system."

An important, yet largely unstudied area is the number of innocent Black fathers who are unjustly killed at the hands of law enforcement. Though understudied, it is a systemic issue that has been discussed within the Black community for decades in many settings like at the family dinner tables, through community discussions, activist work, and other cultural means. One early example is from the late Tupac Shakur's hip hop song Changes (1998), where he addresses the killings of Black individuals at the hands of law enforcement, by saying, "Cops give a damn about a negro. Pull the trigger kill a n****, he's a hero." This continues to resonate today, whether it is Alton Sterling, a father of five who was shot for selling cd's in Baton Rouge; Philando Castile, a 32-year old father who was shot and killed in front of his four-year old daughter after his girlfriend had been stopped; Eric Garner leaving four children behind after being choked to death; or 27-year old DeJuan Guilory who begged for his life by pleading, "Please don't shoot me; I have three kids", to officers seconds prior to being gunned downed as a result of "routine traffic stop." These four instances alone forced thirteen children to experience the absence of a father within their homes and negated the active role that these men played both in their communities and in their children's lives.

For example, Philando Castile was not just taken away from his four-year old daughter. His death impacted a larger population of students at the St. Paul Public Schools where he worked for over a decade. Described as a kind, gentle, and caring employee who took the time to get to know each one of his students, parents reached out to explain the role that Mr. Castile had in their children's lives. One parent, Rebecca Murray, said "He knew every single one by

name, pushed extra food in them like a grandma, and sneaked extra graham crackers into my son's bag because [my son] got a kick out of it." It did not stop there; another parent reported:

> My daughter knew him [Philando Castile], saw him twice a day, every day, at school where he greeted her with jokes and smiles. We've talked generally about Black Lives Matter, but I haven't told [my daughter] about Mr. Castile. I'm going to need to get myself together first. (Andrea Ledger)

These statements were congruent with hundreds of other parents who came out to speak against his wrongful death. Friends, co-workers, and parents viewed him as much more than his job or another stereotypical Black man. They saw him as a role model who taught their children how to be respectful to each other.

Mentioning such involuntary absences is just as important as the overly studied factors within the fatherhood field like fathers' lack of education, relationships with their children's mothers, work schedules, or fathers voluntarily walking out of a child's life. While some research has explored mass incarceration, post-traumatic effects of slavery, and policy changes in relation to Black fathers, these issues tend to be undermentioned in the field. Only recently have we seen academic articles begin to address the blatant disregard for Black and brown humans taken at the hands of police officers. In his article, *Two Nations, Revisited: The Lynching of Black and Brown Bodies, Police Brutality, and Racial Control in 'Post-Racial' Amerikka,* Embrick (2015) reports that more than 300 Black individuals were killed by law enforcement in 2014; yet, fewer than 1 in 3 were actually suspects of a violent crime or allegedly armed. He argues that this is a racialized act of social control. Currently, per mappingpoliceviolence.org, 242 Black individuals have been killed by police offices, enhancing the probability that some children will grow up fatherless. Yet, when these Black fathers are presented as absent from

their home, it is rarely shown as a result of societal unjust inequalities. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the media's distorted images of Black individuals play a role in the justification of the deaths of Black and brown individuals as they are often painted as criminals (Embrick, 2015).

This study used a framework that emphasizes that there are a large portion of Black fathers who are actively involved in their children's lives. This study also recognizes that not all Black fathers are present and amongst those that are not, other understudied factors such as mass incarceration, police shootings, and public policies play a large role. In other words, the unfeatured factors mentioned above should not be overlooked when studying fathers who are truly not present in their children's lives. While these features are not solely responsible for the number of African American fathers living outside of the same home as their young children, such information is critical to understanding a more complete story of African American fatherhood.

Negotiating the Two Worlds

A key strength of Black fathers is their ability to overcome barriers. Some describe them as bicultural because of their ability to navigate through society by code switching between European and African American cultures. In spite of Black fathers' effective "fathering" practices, many of them still recognize that they are evaluated based on two realities, one which is solely driven by their race. A case in point, following the release of the CDC's study that surveyed over 3,900 fathers and suggested Black fathers are in fact involved in their children's everyday life, NBCBLK (an extension of a online NBC source that elevates America's conversations about Black identity, politics, and culture) reached out to a few Black fathers to gain their perspectives on the study. One of the fathers was Dovin Richards, the author of

daddydoinwork.com. During his interview he was asked what it meant to be a Black father in 2015, to which he responded:

> Being a Black dad in 2015 is complicated. In addition to managing toddler tantrums, diaper changes, and play-dates - I can't help but notice society's perception of me. When I'm with my kids, I get overwhelming praise due to the bar for Black fathers being so low that you could trip over it. Internally, I'm like, "Hey, this is what I'm supposed to do. I don't want any props for this."

Dovin Richard's response suggests that beyond the typical fathering responsibilities, he is also faced with the stereotypical dilemmas of being a Black father. With so much focus placed on the stereotypical image of Black fathers not being around, many programs have been created to get these fathers to assimilate to the dominant culture by getting married, thus leaving little to no room to focus on their positive distinctive fathering attributes. In other words, much of the literature has focused on these fathers' deficits which are reinforced by stereotypical images, rather than noticing their abilities to raise their children in a society in which they will experience unique barriers.

Fathers who have had the chance to participate in structured interviews, biographical sketches, ethnographic investigations, community-based observations, and other qualitative approaches have provided a much different picture from the negative narratives that are often depicted of them. In such studies, these fathers demonstrate great pride and joy in their children, reporting that their children are their heart, buddies, and princesses (Jordan-Zachery, 2017). Further focusing on what these fathers are actually sharing about their experiences would allow others to discover just how special their children, family, and communities are to them (Conner & White, 2007; Wade-Gayles, 1997).

Family literature scholars have encouraged researchers to capture the ways that these men "father" without comparing them to the dominant culture. For instance, McAdoo (1986) suggests that social scientists should evaluate Black fathers' roles, performance, and socialization based on more realistic measures that culturally fit their needs and not mainstreams' views of fatherhood. Thirty years later, we continue to hear the same recommendations by scholars such as Oscar Barbarin, Nastasha Cabrera, and Barbara Rogoff (2017), who question the evaluations of father involvement and the ways that African American and other minority families are compared to what mainstream society has considered to be the "norm." Such practices discredit individual cultural strengths amongst various populations and feed into the notion that these fathers are stereotypically not good fathers. For instance, comparing the number of Black two-parent households to White two-parent households creates an assumption that Black fathers are not around. This comparison also disallows for other unique factors such as mass incarceration and institutionalized racism.

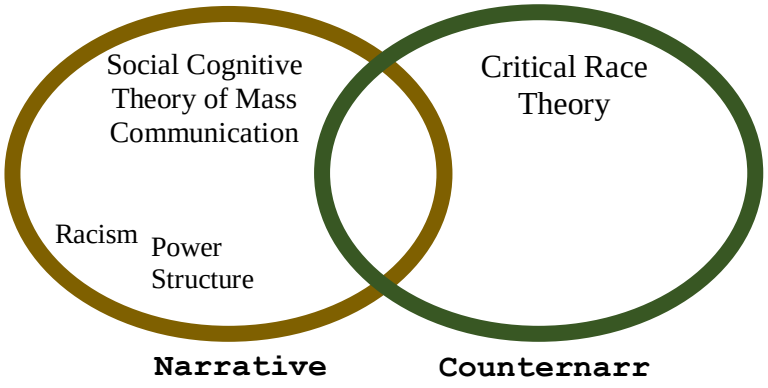
Taking it one step further, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, an African American sociologist, suggests approaching these fathers with an entirely fresh set of eyes will allow future scholars to see them for who they actually are. Lightfoot, a portraitist who studies the culture within education and the relationship between human development and social change claims that there is a certain script that society offers—one rooted in stereotypes. While this particular statement was made in relation to difficult adolescents, it could be extended to Black fathers. Following her groundbreaking work, this study aims to look at Black fathers with fresh eyes, analyzing the active role that they play within their families as providers and nurturers, in addition to the unique techniques that they use to prepare their children for the world and how fathers feel that media reflects or doesn't reflect those roles.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The research questions proposed in this study are situated within Bell's (1980s) critical race theory (CRT), Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory (SCT) of mass communication, and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory (see Figure 1). As a collective, these theories provide a framework to explore participants' responses, placing race at the center of the fathers' answers to gain a deeper understanding of the ways that these fathers make meaning out of outsiders' perspectives—specifically, the dominant culture's representation of them. Acknowledging that racism is ingrained in nearly every aspect of the U.S. experience and that the distorted images of African American men in media is another form of systematic oppression, it is important to analyze such portrayals while still considering the impact of other social factors.

The combination of the CRT and the sociocultural philosophy speak to the discourse between outsider and insider perceptions of Black fatherhood as it acknowledges that there is another reality that mainstream broadcasted media content has not valued, which is the diversity of Black fathers within the fatherhood community. Finally, the SCT of mass communication gives meaning to the self-reflection practices fathers engage in as they explore their personal experiences in relation to the narratives that outsiders have placed on them.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework



Critical Race Theory

The critical race theory (CRT) was established in the mid-1980s by Derrick Bell and colleagues as a theoretical reaction to the fault-finding legal studies. Originally created to intensely examine society and culture—specifically at the intersection of race, law, and power—this theory has placed the impact of race, racism, and oppression at the center of its investigation. UCLA School of Public Affairs described CRT as a theoretical framework that:

> Recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining existing power structures. CRT identifies that these power structures are based on White privilege and White supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color.

Since the 1980s, CRT has expanded beyond the field of law into the areas of education, political science, women's studies, ethnic studies, and American Studies, while also extending its bandwidth to examine the intersectionality of various struggles (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Mutua, 2000). Originating with a very narrow focus on African American experiences within the United States by exposing the influence race-neutrality and colorblindness had on marginalized populations, this theory has identified the ways in which narratives can serve as a discriminatory means that continues to feed the existing structures of power, holding certain populations back. For example, the continuous dominant outsider portrayals of Black men as "thugs" feed into society's perspective that Black men are criminals to be feared. This portrayal neglects the respectful, kind, religious, well-spirited, resilient, and overall upstanding citizens that these men are. Similarly, the lack of two-parent African American family households shown on TV continues to perpetuate the stereotype that Black men are not present for their

children. Messages surrounding Black fathers being absent from their children's lives are so ingrained in the dominant culture that when a Black mother and child are presented on television, it is almost assumed that the father is not a part of their lives. These deficit-based messages often go against the daily, lived realities of Black families, specifically, fathers, who are very active within their children's lives even in cases where they are separated from their child's mother. The divergence between the ways that these fathers are depicted through broadcasted media and their realities can leave them wondering about media's intent.

With media being identified as one of the many power structures in the U.S., it can be problematic to racial minorities—specifically African American men through the distorted portrayals—making it essential to analyze this study through a critical race lens. The causal link between media and general audience members has created several serious implications from the negative stereotypes on television (Kang, 2005). For instance, some White Americans have developed ill feelings for LatinX Americans based on images that they have seen on television (Doug & Murrillo, 2007). The bad feelings that were developed as a result of the televised images carry over into the real world, creating additional hardships for this population. Televised media also plays a role in implicit bias, which has contributed to the disproportionality among people of color in various American structures, such as the education system, justice system, and overall employment (Welch, 2007). This study analyzes fathers' responses to media's portrayal of them through a lens that recognizes media as a power structure in U.S. society that is racist by nature.

With an overall goal of eliminating all forms of oppression by determining the ways that racism is perpetuated, for instance through the deficit narratives created around Black fathers, various scholars have suggested that once an oppressive behavior has been identified, it needs to

be problematized in order to make any shifts in the systematic institutions (Lynn, 1999; Martin, 2014). Since the negative portrayals of Black fathers have been identified in various media, the impact that these presentations may have on fathers' behaviors, thoughts, or actions should be analyzed. Once the implications have been problematized, efforts can be pursed to change the systematic institutions such as in media and academia. Since CRT prioritizes social justice and the voices of participants, this theory is particularly fitting for this study, which also emphasizes the importance of learning directly from the experiences and voices of African American fathers (Chapen, 2007). Gaining a deeper understanding from these fathers' experiences will assist in creating more comprehensive profiles of Black fathers by providing a counter-narrative to the current story, and allowing for a more accurate and complete picture to be captured of these fathers. An essential component of CRT is recognizing the influence of mainstream narratives and developing counter-narratives, which allow marginalized populations to name their own realities, and challenge the stories told about them by the dominant culture (Delgado & Stefanic, 1993; Park et al., 1998). In other words, gathering fathers together to explore mainstream broadcasted content surrounding Black fatherhood will allow them to analyze the current narratives that are assigned to them, and to share their own lived experiences and stories about fatherhood.

Through this platform, fathers can share their own realities, capturing the nuances that are rarely shared through the dominant culture. For example, The Root (2017) recently accredited social media as being one of the biggest platforms responsible for shifting the narratives of young Black fathers, citing fathers such as La Guardia Cross who uses social media to post daily blogs of his parenting skills, Mr. Cross and many other Black fathers are showing just how

involved they are in their children's lives. Several scholars, such as Janice Kelly (Edwards, 2016), have found value in such messaging. Referring to Black fathers, Kelly said:

> Blogging, Twitter and everything else, there's multiple voices out there that are not going to let themselves become silent to the media, and that's very important. They need to tell their stories. What is written in journals or on television does not necessarily replicate what is being experienced in our society.

While others agreed with her, many still recognize that education serves as an equalizer. Kenneth Braswell, the founder and executive director of Fathers Incorporated, stated:

> I think that is writing more books, I think that is producing more films, doing more research on our people… beginning to tell the stories that have never been told before about Black men and Black boys and Black women and Black families. I think we need to highlight each other more.

These comments reiterate the importance of individualized platforms—that can serve as a powerful dynamic to dispel many societal myths, and the need for additional research to be conducted with Black fathers and families. This study used CRT to bring the voices and stories of African American fathers to the attention of academics by better understanding how they feel about how the media portrays them. The study provides a counter-story to the stereotypical Black absent father narrative that continues to reinforce discrimination and racist practices toward these men. Furthermore, this study describes what fathers wish outsiders understood about Black fatherhood.

Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication

To examine what messages Black fathers receive about themselves through televised media, I used Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory (SCT) of mass communication. SCT is an expansion of Holt's and Brown's original social cognitive theory, which began in the 1960s in the field of psychology and has since extended to into other areas such as education and communication. With the notion that humans are self-developing, regulating, and reflecting organisms, Bandura (2009) believed that people's development, transformation, and adaptation are largely ingrained in social systems like mass media. Additionally, Bandura believed that images on television demonstrated a social reality, which often reflected a set of views or biases about a certain group, social relations, and norms within U.S. society. This suggests that the ways that Black fathers are shown on broadcasted television reflects attributes that society has deemed as norms for this group, even in cases where those "norms" do not align with fathers' actual lived experiences. For example, media tends to portray a "good" father as being a middle or upper class White male who is married and lives with his family, thus conveying that the societal norm of a good father is a man who is married, White, and financially stable, consequently using misguided information to form policies. For instance, when examining the majority of fatherhood policies pertaining to fathers of color, many of them are centered around "fixing" Black fathers by promoting marriage, while neglecting other essential variables. The term "norm" is vital to this study as it captures the set of views or biases imposed on this group by dominant culture.

Although SCT of mass communication has several components, this study focuses primarily on (1) reciprocal determinism and (2) observational learning. Bandura (1977) explains reciprocal determinism as essential to observational learning, in which different individuals seek

out different types of media content. This is important in analyzing the forms of televised media that fathers chose to watch, the symbolization they receive from it, and their self-reflection. Tomlin and Vieweg (2016) describe reflection as one of many mindfulness skills that allow people to focus on the present moment and create an awareness of their own experiences and responses, while still being conscious of others. However, self-reflection is not always an intentional act; it can also occur naturally when one is exposed to something that is misaligned with their values or beliefs. For example, one father may report not watching a particular television show because it does not positively represent the Black family. Another father may report watching that particular show through a skeptical lens being that the fathering style does not align with their values. Although both fathers engage in self-reflection, one is more intentional.

The observational learning principle of Bandura's theory suggests that people are more likely to mirror behaviors that are realistic, similar, attractive, or rewarding in some way. In others words, Black fathers are more likely to imitate behaviors that may result in positive affirmations or have been modeled for them. Considering the distorted portrayals of Black fathers on broadcasted television rather than modeling the inaccurate images, fathers may use survival techniques to shield themselves and their families from the misleading portrayals. For instance, a father might not watch television at all or be very selective of the shows that he does watch. Alternatively, given the unique barriers that these fathers experience by larger unjust power structures, they may be less likely to take what is being presented at face value and more likely to question the forces, which in this case would be the producers, society, and media's credibility. Still, others may engage in some form of self-reflection, examining their own

experiences to determine whether media's references are trustworthy or not. These fathers thus exhibit one of the many ways that they interact with the world.

Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural philosophy suggests that the human mind is constructed through interactions with the world (Verenikina, 2010). Adopting Vygotsky's belief that human development is constructed from individuals' interactions with their society, this study provides data on some significant exchanges that influence Black fathers' understanding of their roles. Vygotsky's theory set the foundation that currently recognizes the wealth of knowledge that is attained within the home and community, making this theory well-suited to guide this study. Furthermore, noting the prevalent role that culture plays both in sociocultural theory and in how fathers make meaning of their experiences are fitting for this study. For example, in a community that values social fathering, it is not unusual to have others beyond biological fathers to serve as strong fatherly role models. Sociocultural theory suggests that such wealth of knowledge was obtained through exchanges among fathers within their homes and other community settings, generating the concept of social fathering as a cultural norm.

Recognizing that learning is a social construct and cannot occur in isolation, the sociocultural theory places an emphasis on the fact that knowledge is also acquired within community settings and real life experiences. This is referred to as situated cognition. Situated cognition recognizes a wealth of knowledge that stems from different environments, and suggests that such knowledge has a strong tie to the culture in which it is learned. Since Black fathers' realities rarely coincide with the ways that they are depicted, real life situations may be essential to their understanding of what they desire for the dominant culture to know about their fatherly attributes as well as the ways that they make meaning out of their fatherly roles.

Positionality. In recognition of the clash between the portrayal of Black fathers and their actual lived experiences, this study uses the critical race and sociocultural theories' concept of insider and outsider perspectives to explore the imbalances between the two phenomena. Outsiders' perspectives are often constructed through second-hand experiences such as obtaining knowledge about a certain population through indirect stories or learning opportunities. Insiders typically have lived experiences as members within particular groups. Recently, some have suggested a third position in the middle of the outsiders' and insiders' perceptions, referred to as the in-betweeners (Katyal & King, 2011; Milligan, 2016). Since researchers are unable to fully identify with one population or another, it is nearly impossible to completely be an insider or outsider. The in-betweener position accounts for the intersectionality of positions and speaks to my positionality as the principal investigator. I have served as an early childhood professional who worked with children within the same age range as the participants' children, which provided me with insight about topics surrounding young children. This connection provided me some credibility among fathers who have young children.

However, two of my other identifiable traits—race and gender— may have placed me at the level of both an insider and outsider making the in-betweener a better description of my position. As an African American woman, my race placed me as an insider in that I can relate to the ways that the narratives of the dominant culture misrepresent Black culture and community. Having been raised within the African American tradition that embraces the "it takes a village" philosophy, I have been nurtured by various African American men including my biological father, grandfather, stepfather, uncles, and other close fathers of the family whom we considered kin. Experiencing a father who attended sports games, graduation, and a few

parent-teacher conferences highlighted a different fatherly role than those that I watched on television or acquired from the mainstream dominant culture. Feeling the comfort, love, and support of a stepfather who is, still currently walking alongside me as I complete my academic journey, speaks to the flexibility of Black fathers' roles that are rarely captured by dominant culture. These and many other experiences provide me with an insider view to Black fathers. Yet, I still identify and am viewed as a Black woman. Despite the numerous close relationships that I have had with Black fathers and having been raised by Black fathers, I am still not a Black man or a father, which positions me as an outsider.

While race and gender are the most identifiable traits that influence my position as a researcher, other unspoken attributes such as my age, socioeconomic status, marital status, and education also influence my position. Addressing my research positionality within the theoretical framework is essential to considering my impact on the fathers' comfortability, my understanding of common communal phrases, jokes, and cultural contexts, as well as my ability to get into spaces where these fathers are. For instance, my insider's perspective afforded me the opportunity to identify, initiate, and build partnerships with organizations who served Black fathers. In turn, collaborating with trusted community partners created trust within focus groups. Fathers were able to enter familiar environments with a sense of ownership and were ready to candidly share their experiences and insights. Fathers also demonstrated a sense of community throughout the focus groups, which was important to consider when analyzing the data

Considering all three theories and my positionality, I speculated that fathers will believe that racism is the driving force of the negative stereotypes associated with Black men and as a result, that the stereotypes disregard the genuine fatherly actions, behaviors, and attitudes that these dads exhibit with their children. Likewise, I suspect that the tension between the African

American fathers' two realities may affect how they father in both positive and negative ways. Positively, the stereotypes may have some impact on these fathers' need to actively discuss or demonstrate that they are in fact engaging fathers to their children to combat the stereotypes that they face. However, some fathers may conform to the negative effects that the damaging narratives have on their community, family, and society at large. Finally, I assume that fathers will struggle with the ways that they are portrayed by media as they are not a true indication of who they are or what they represent, hence creating an urge for them to set boundaries surrounding the type of broadcasted media they are willing to consume.

Chapter 4: Methodology

To gain a deeper understanding of the ways that media representations influence African American fathers, this study employed three independent semi-structured qualitative focus groups. As qualitative practices are often situated in fields that seek to examine everyday life concerns inductively, this method was well-suited for the study. Specifically, focus groups have been recognized as a valuable research method to elicit culturally sensitive information from populations who have been categorized as disadvantaged or hard to reach (Barbour, 2007). Focus groups typically consist of a small number of people who have certain characteristics and allow qualitative data to be gathered during a discussion to gain a deeper understanding of a particular topic (Delamont, 2012; Krueger & Casey, 2015). Through peer support and community reassurance, group members are often empowered to share their personal views and lived experiences (Fagan, 1995). In the present study, group members were given the opportunity to speak from a societal perspective rather than an individual deficit perspective, thereby creating a safer space for the Black fathers to share their personal experiences. This process also provided me- the researcher - with the opportunity to observe the social interactions

among the participants as they spoke about their depictions in the media. This process generated direct data on fathers' similarities, differences, and other insights among the groups' experiences and opinions, in accordance with the strengths of focus groups (Delamont, 2012; Morgan, 1997).

Similar to previous studies that have employed focus groups with African American fathers (e.g., Fagan & Stevenson, 1995; Wright et al, 2011), some participants in this study shared how grateful they were to be surrounded by other Black fathers in the group. This supported the notion that culturally these men formed communal bonds where they can lean on one another for various forms of support. This cultural trait among African Americans has continued to prosper despite the many challenges of racism they face (Billingsley, 1992). In other words, cultural and social interactions with community members are vital to studying the ways that Black fathers understand outsiders' perception of them. For this reason, the use of focus groups was well-suited for this study.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers in qualitative studies are considered a data collection instrument and often play an active role within the research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). As a result, for this study, I worked closely with three community partners to identify African American fathers of young children (prenatal to five) and aimed to establish a strong rapport with each site. I also served as the moderator for all three focus groups. My role as a moderator included probing participants with questions and utilizing other techniques to promote participation of all fathers. For example, the crossed conversation technique was employed during each focus group. In using this technique, I specifically asked participants who had not shared how they felt about the current question or other members' responses. Given my prominent role in this study, it is

important to mention that I am an African American female with over 10 years of experience working with families—in particular parents of young children. As previously mentioned, certain characteristics placed me as an insider within this study (e.g., my race and community belonging), while other traits placed me as an outsider (e.g., my gender and position as the researcher). Given that I was not quite an insider, yet not a full outsider, I saw my position as an inbetweener. There were times during the focus groups that fathers connected with me around cultural nuances that I was assumed to know. For example, during one of the focus groups a father attempted to refer to a television show but could not remember the name. As he described the characters in the show, he looked at me as he said, "There's a new show out and um. Yeah I know you're hip, come on. Don't act like you don't know that one, come on sister." The term "sister" was used in reference to me in more than one focus group, which is a cultural expression of endearment that suggests I am seen as family. Fathers also used words that were specific to the African American culture to emphasize their point. As a woman of color in the academy, I follow in the footsteps of previous scholars, such as Nina Asher, who have been intentional about self-reflexivity. Therefore, at the end of this chapter, I critically examine self-reflexivity in relation to my work with Black fathers.

Given my partial position as an insider, it was important for me to limit what I shared in relation to my culture, role, and behavior until the end of the study so that it would not interfere with what fathers felt they could share (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Given the history of African American families and the dynamics between Black fathers and Black mothers, I also had to consider that our gender difference could pose additional challenges to what fathers were willing to share (Collins, 2005). To counter some uncomfortable feelings and to ensure another perspective, I included an African American male as an assistant moderator who was present at

all three focus groups. As recommended by Krueger and Casey (2009), for this study I used a moderating team approach, which consisted of me as the moderator and an African American male as the assistant moderator. The assistant moderator's tasks included setting up the audio recorder and the room, engaging in conversations with fathers prior to the group, meeting with me following each group, and taking notes throughout the discussion. The assistant moderator did not participate in the facilitation of the focus groups but had an instrumental role in the summarization, debrief, and follow-up meetings that led to minor shifts throughout the process. For example, in the first focus group, the assistant moderator tried to capture fathers' reports in their entirety. During the initial follow-up meeting, the moderation team decided that the assistant would only strive to note fathers' non-verbal cues, including any form of agreement that they had with each other. Prior to the first focus group, the assistant moderator and I held a training, where we: 1) reviewed the focus group protocols, 2) explained the focus group checklist, 3) discussed the depth of information to be collected, 4) reviewed the data collection procedure (i.e., capturing quotes and main ideas), and 5) debriefed on the conceptual framework to ensure that the entire team had the same information. This hour and a half training took place a week prior to the initial focus group. We also held two additional meetings the weeks prior to the remaining two groups to discuss the logistics of the upcoming groups, what worked well with the prior focus groups, and any additional changes that we thought needed to take place. We arrived thirty minutes prior to each focus group to check-in with each other and set-up the room. We also took thirty minutes following each group to do a quick summarization about concepts that were prominent for us and to upload the recordings. Finally, we each wrote brief memos for two of the groups. We were conscious of our roles and the influence that they could have on the discussion. Therefore, we tried to balance sharing enough to create a community where fathers

understood that there was no judgment, while also being clear that it was important for them to share the nuances of their experiences even in cases where they believed what they were sharing was obvious.

Recruitment and Participants

Utilizing a purposeful sampling method (Merriam, 2009), participants were selected based on their unique experiences as African American fathers of young children (prenatal to five). I collaborated with three independent community partners to recruit fathers who self-identified as African American, were between the ages of 18-65, and were expecting or had a young child (birth to five). All three community partners served a large African American population in some capacity. The first community partner was one of the largest African American churches in Washington State. The church had over 13 years of public worship, community service and dedication to families as a unit. The second community partner was an early learning center that served a diverse population by supporting young children and their families through a variety of comprehensive services. The third partner was a trusted faith-based community organization geared specifically towards fathers, having been operating in the community for over 17 years. All three organizations were well-suited for this study as they were trusted within their communities and dedicated to the growth of parents, including fathers. Working with these community partners was a critical component in the recruitment of participants for this study, as has been shown in prior qualitative studies (Hayes et al., 2010; Lemay et al., 2010). Despite the variation in relationships between the fathers and the organizations, all of the fathers had some form of connection to the specific community partner where their focus group took place. Eligible fathers were invited by the site leader from each

community to be a part of a 2-hour focus group. Invited fathers were provided with a flier and information about the study before deciding if they wanted to participate.

One focus group was conducted at each of the three community organizations. In total, thirteen fathers participated in the study. The average number of participants per focus group was 4, which is within the basic guidelines for focus group membership (Delamont, 2012; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Morgan, 1997). The first two focus groups consisted of 5 fathers each and the third focus group included 3 fathers.

Fathers varied in their ages, work statuses, education, and the number of children they had. The youngest father was 18 years old and the eldest father was 63 years old. The other fathers ranged in age from 31 to 41 years old, with the exception of one father who was 26. The fathers' employment included working full-time (n=8), working part-time (n=3), and unemployed/laid off (n=2). Similarly, their education varied from having a master's degree (n=4), bachelor's degree (n=3), associates degree (n=2), high school graduate (n=3) to less than high school (n=1). Regarding relationship statuses, eight were married, three were cohabiting, one was divorced, and one was single. For this study, the term "father" included all biological, step, adoptive, and foster fathers. Seven of the fathers reported being only biological fathers, while five participants reported being both biological and stepfathers, and one father did not specify. To ensure that the study captured the essence of African American fatherhood, it also include social fathers (grandfathers, uncles etc.) in its recruitment efforts if the child's biological father was not present, and the social father reported playing the primary fathering role in that child's life. Traditionally, fatherhood definitions have excluded the concept of social fathering. This role is essential to understanding the nuances of African American fathers' experiences

(Conner & White, 2006; Jayakody & Kalil, 2002). Yet, none of the participants self-identified as social fathers.

Setting

Focus group discussions were held at three separate community locations in spaces where fathers would feel comfortable based on their connection to the community partner. All groups took place in informal private meeting rooms where fathers sat in chairs surrounding a table, thus ensuring that everyone felt included in the conversation. I sat in the middle of the grouping to moderate, while the assistant moderator sat at the far ends of the tables so that he had sufficient space to take detailed notes. All fathers were given nameplates and offered refreshments prior to the start of the discussion in order to promote conversation and build community amongst the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Procedures

Table 1 provides a detailed timeline of research procedures. All three focus groups took place in autumn 2017. Prior to the semi-structured focus groups, several collaboration meetings occurred with the identified community leaders from each site. During these logistical meetings, recruitment strategies, possible barriers to fathers' participation, and information that the community organization would like to obtain as a result of the study were discussed. Only one site offered specific areas of interest. During the meetings with the community sites, materials were also distributed through study packets, which included recruitment fliers (Appendix A), father contact information forms (Appendix B), and a copy of the participant consent form (Appendix C). I worked closely with each site leader to determine the best date, time and location for the focus groups. We also worked together to determine the most suitable token of

appreciation for fathers at each site in the form of a gift card. One week prior to the focus groups, the community leader reminded fathers about the gathering.

Upon arrival, the fathers were asked to complete the consent and demographic forms (Appendices C & E). I ensured that all participants understood what they were agreeing to by summarizing sections of the consent form verbally. All fathers were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could leave the study or not answer a particular question at any time. To ensure data security, confidential information was not used in the focus group discussion. As an additional measure, fathers were given an identification number that corresponded with their contact information. This information was kept in a separate document (i.e., a spreadsheet that will go to the UW's College of Education) that verified fathers received their gift cards. Name tents were provided solely for community building; fathers were reminded that their names would not be used in any reports.

The average length of the focus groups was 2 hours and 15 minutes. The semi-structured questioning itself lasted approximately 100-115 minutes; the remainder of the time was allotted for paperwork, final questions, and the distribution of gift cards.

Using a semi-structured interview guide—the most frequently used technique within qualitative research—eight questions were posed to elicit information in a systematic way (see Appendix D). This format allowed me to ask follow-up questions and seek clarification based on participants' responses (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Kallio et al, 2016; Marks, 2004). The group discussion began with an opening question, which all fathers were asked to answer (i.e., please share your first name and one thing you love about being a father). Such opening questions are typically designed to seek short answers that allow all fathers to talk since engaging participants early on increases their likelihood of sharing sooner within the discussion

(Krueger & Casey, 2015). Following the opening question, fathers were asked a question designed to introduce the topic of discussion and get them thinking about the televised media portrayal of African American fathers. As a means to introduce the topic and another measure to get fathers talking, the second question used a "ranking exercise," one of the most common focus group techniques (Bloor, 2001). I provided fathers with an envelope that included four images of African American fathers. Fathers were then asked to sort the photos ranking them from 1 to 4, with "1" representing the image that they believed is most likely to be shown on television and "4" representing an image that is least likely to be portrayed on television. Questions 3 through 5 were key to the essence of the study. Therefore, these questions were given a majority of the discussion time. We allotted approximately 50 minutes for these three questions. Question 6 was the "*ending question*" to the portrayal of Black fathers. This was a two-part question (i.e., "What are some aspects of African American fathers you believe are missing that you would like to be shown on TV?" and "Is there anything else that I missed or you would like to add about Black fathers and the media?"). The final two questions (7 & 8) varied based on the community partner needs and interests.

Data Collection

Data were collected through audio recordings, notes from the assistant moderator, and our observations. Discussions were recorded at each focus group on two separate audio recorders, which is the most common data instrument for focus groups (Bloor, 2001; Krueger & Casey, 2009). To ensure the quality of data, digital recorders, specifically MP3 or WMA formats were used, which are smaller in size and can be less distracting to the participants (Bloor, 2001).

Immediately following each focus group, the recordings were uploaded onto a secure computer. The assistant moderator took notes during each discussion, in which he used a blend of note taking techniques to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data. For example, it was crucial for the assistant moderator to capture the IDs of the speakers, which were later compared to the audio recordings (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Krueger & Casey, 2000). Since I moderated the focus group, I did not take detailed notes but did complete brief memos (Krueger & Casey, 2015). We also drew a diagram of the seating arrangements and debriefed following each focus group.

Analysis Plan

At the completion of the focus groups, I uploaded the audio files to my computer on a secure UW drive and deleted all audio recordings from the recorders. After listening to both recordings, I decided which audio would be sent off for transcription based on clarity. Since focus group transcriptions are known to take up to five times the actual recording time, I decided to use a transcription agency. I requested that the transcriptions be completed verbatim, include numbers lines, and be converted to both Microsoft Word documents and PDFs to make the data easy and quick to access when coding (Bloor, 2001). Once transcriptions were returned, I did a cross-check analysis to ensure the accuracy and increase my familiarity with all the data. During this time, I went through each line of the transcription to ensure that all audible speech was transcribed as recorded, including the "um," "not sure," "hmm," and cases where fathers repeat themselves prior to finishing their sentences. Since the benefits of video recording did not outweigh the cost of the fathers' comfortability level or trust, for this study, no data was video recorded. The transcriptions were compared to the assistant moderator's field notes and the debriefing notes that occurred immediately after each focus group. After all three discussions

were transcribed and every action was taken to reproduce the group as it took place, the data analysis began.

For the data analysis process, I used the widely popular, yet under branded thematic approach. This approach is appropriate for studies aiming to explore the meanings behind gathered data. The thematic method has been considered a foundational practice for qualitative analysis and includes the following five phases: identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). For this study, the assistant moderator and I began the analysis process by independently immersing ourselves in the transcripts. First, we explored every sentence, line by line. As we familiarized ourselves with the data, we highlighted quotes and common themes that stood out for us. After the first phase of coding, we met to debrief and discuss clarifying questions. Following that meeting, we began to generate initial codes into a codebook. Over the course of reading transcripts, we continued to add new codes to the codebook. The second phase took place over the course of several weeks. In this phase, we re-read each transcript and used the codebook to assign codes to sections of text using the qualitative coding programming Atlas.ti (Atlas.ti, 2007). We then met weekly for three to four hours to discuss whether new codes should be created, combined, or deleted. In naming codes (here on out referred to as categories), we were intentional in using quotes from participants, also known as “in vivo” coding (Marks, 2004).

After coding the first transcript, we came together to discuss the codes and decide on final categories. In instances where we had different codes, we worked together until we came to an agreement on the category. We each explained why we chose the codes that we did and why we felt it was the best fit. Given that the list of categories started to become more extensive as we coded the second and third transcript, the assistant moderator and I engaged in the constant

comparative method. We identified new codes and revisited previous data to ensure that the earlier transcripts did not contain any data that supported those codes (Emerson et al., 2001; Mark, 2004). During these meetings, the assistant moderator and I were able to identify themes amongst the various categories. Phase three of the analysis process was driven by the three initial research questions, but we also kept the theoretical framework in the forefront of the process. While we completed all initial coding independently, we then went through each code together and came to a consensus on the themes and the data that supported the various themes.

Graphic Narrative

To counter the harmful narratives generated about Black fathers, I supplemented the traditional written text with a research-based comic book/ graphic narrative that highlights participants' specific stories. Through fathers' voices, this visual representation enlivens their experiences by capturing several nuances that would otherwise be overlooked. Recognizing the complexity that fathers navigate through when sharing their experiences, shifting back and forth from their past depictions in media, their current fathering practices, and the ways that they wished media would portray them in the future, a visual representation allows the flexibility to address the intersections of all three spaces. Said differently, creating a comic book is an opportunity to follow fathers' lead in a seamless manner. Furthermore, this comic book extends the reach to a larger audience by making my research more accessible to non-traditional academic communities. It also strengthens the dialogue and connection between a particular "hard to reach" research population and the academy, as well as support cross-sector collaboration as a means to challenge research completed in professional silos.

Chapter 5: Results

This study explored (1) the messages that African American fathers received about themselves through broadcasted televised media content, (2) key factors that have influenced their understanding of their fatherly role, and (3) specific qualities that African American fathers felt were missing from their televised depictions. Participants' responses to the semi-structured questions resulted in several themes addressing all three research questions, while generating a number of sub-themes. Two specific themes that emerged regarding the messages that the fathers received about themselves were: positive portrayals of Black fathers are less likely to be displayed on television with the exception of advertisement, and negative or stereotypical images of Black fathers are more likely to be shown on television. In relation to key factors that have influenced Black fathers' understanding of their role, four themes or descriptions emerged from the data. These are relationship with their own father, life exposure, the impact of social fathers, and barriers. The final theme that emerged in regards to specific qualities that participants identified as missing from televised portrayals of Black fathers was a more well-rounded snapshot of African American fatherhood. This particular chapter addresses each research question, highlighting similarities and differences among the fathers by using verbatim quotes as a means to further illuminate their voices.

The Messages Black Fathers Receive

To explore the messages that Black fathers receive about themselves through televised media, all participants received four photos of African American fathers and their young children (see Appendix E). The photos included *Paul*, a Black father who was holding his young child as he walked in front of five police officers; *William*, an African American father standing outside of a car, with one hand pressing up against the glass window while his daughter sat inside the

car; *Larry*, a Black father vacuuming the living room floor as his child walked under his legs; and *Tyrone,* an African American father of an infant who was holding his child in a baby Bjorn as he washed dishes. Upon receiving the envelopes, fathers were asked to rank their set of pictures in order from 1 to 4 (see Table.1). Using this scale, fathers assigned the number "1" to photos that they believed were most likely to be shown on television and the number "4" to photos they believed would not be shown on television.

As fathers independently ranked their photos, a pattern quickly surfaced among all participants across all three focus groups as they immediately identified *Paul* and *William* as the fathers most likely to be shown on television. The rankings of photos quickly turned into a group discussion during which many fathers were eager to share their order and the reasons behind their decisions. Fathers naturally carried on the conversation as they built off of each other's opinions by offering affirmations, laughing, disagreeing, and sharing jokes and stories of their personal lives and fatherhood experiences. While the reasoning behind their rankings varied, the common premise was that televised media was more likely to portray a Black father in a negative or stereotypical manner, in spite of such negative images having contradicted the positive personal relationships that these fathers had with their children.

Zion, a married father of three, shared early on that one of the most impactful things for him as a father was knowing that his children were watching what he did more than listening to what he said. He went on to summarize a large segment of the messages that fathers received from the media. He explained that:

> They're (televised media) not in a hurry to portray us as a people that we really are, which are upstanding citizens and people who want to be present in our kids' lives, and just like any other, you know what I'm sayin'? Individual or just like anybody else who, any other

> upstanding citizen or person with morals and responsibilities who wants to be uh, present parent in their lives.

Having acknowledged a common theme across all three groups, Zion's statement addressed the ways that a majority of fathers responded to the messages that they received from media. In support of Zion's claim, participants made it very clear that outsiders were more likely to portray Black fathers in negative and stereotypical ways. This theme aligned with the critical race theory as many fathers believed that the driving force behind the negative depictions was race. Although many participants reported positive portrayals of Black fathers as being less likely to be displayed on television, a few fathers argued that there were some good Black fathers on television, yet those images were not easily accessible. Some of the examples included fathers from *Black-ish, Power, The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air,* and the father figure in the movie *Are We There Yet.*

Zion suggested that the lack of positive images of Black fathers was in part due to the fact that such positive portrayals of African American fathers would conflict with the destructive historic narratives written about them. He said:

> They're not in a hurry to put that out there because it's counter to what they've painted for all of these years, for hundreds of years, for the whole big, Black, brute, aggressive Black man. They can't put a picture of a Black man with his baby in a baby Bjorn washing dishes and, they can't put that on the (laughs) ... They can't put it widespread in the media on TV because then it starts to make people look at us. People meaning White people, and uh, it makes them start to look at us for who we are, which are human beings.

As fathers analyzed, ranked, and discussed each photo there were several sub-themes that emerged in support of the main themes. One subtheme was that nearly all fathers found the

photos of *Tyrone* and *Larry* more relatable to who they were as fathers. Yet, they realized that these men were not likely to be portrayed on television unless it was in the form of advertisements such as a Cheerios, Pampers, or Swiffer commercial. Furthermore, in spite of the photos of *Paul* and *William* being incongruent with a majority of the participants' fatherhood experiences, all of them ranked these two photos *(Paul or William*) as most likely to be shown on television, suggesting that both photos supported a stereotypical narrative of Black fathers. These photos represented separation, issues with the law, and the absent Black father. Below I describe each theme in detail addressing a number of categories that were generated from each photo.

I mean, realistically Tyrone and Larry are me. David, a married father of three said the fathers he knew, rich or poor, were active in their children's lives. When asked if there was anything else his group wanted to say about *Tyrone* or *Larry*, David responded, "I mean, realistically for me that's me." This comment sparked a great deal of cross conversation, in which fathers explained why they were able to relate to *Tyrone* and *Larry* as father figures, given that they too played an active role in raising their children and engaging in household tasks. The conversation went as follows:

David: I mean, realistically for me that's me.

Jeremiah: That's us!

Cameron: Yeah.

Jeremiah: Yeah. *Tyrone* and *Larry* is who we are.

Cameron: Yeah. Yeah, that's

David: When I see *Tyrone*, like that's what I see at home

Cameron: Those two, these two pictures are me. (laughs) When my kids were little I was

> trying to vacuum…like, move! I'm just trying to clean!

Cameron, a married father of two—who was clear that he could not be without his children as he cherished every moment they spent together—shared a story of when he was in that exact same situation as *Larry*. Other fathers in all three groups also revealed how their roles included household tasks such as cooking and cleaning. Some fathers specifically reported shared domestic responsibilities with their partners by rotating shifts, while others indicated that the household duties were their responsibility—especially if their children's mothers were the ones working at that time.

One participant took the dialogue a step further by questioning the father's role on the television show *Black-ish*, which several of his group members identified as one of the few shows that portrayed a Black father in a positive light. He said,

> The dad is engaged but you never, to me, really see him doing uh, co-parenting or the house in terms of actually engage. Cleaning, you know, they just had the baby and he was looking like he was falling apart because the wife was dealing with post-partum, you know.

In this particular quote, Jeremiah—who referred to himself as an extremely protective parent—challenged the role that was assigned to the father on *Black-ish* and extended it to fathers in general. He prefaced his comment by stating "these two (*Larry* & *Tyrone*) we don't see because, I just don't think that there is enough about males actually, uh, doing, right." The "right" that Jeremiah was referring to is males portrayed as engaged in co-parenting and household tasks. Malik, a father of one, supported this concept and reported that at times he actually changed the channel from *Black-ish* because he was unsure of the message that they were trying to convey about fathers. He stated:

> … sometimes even when I watch shows and watch movies, I look at them with a different lens. Sometimes I'm watching *Black-ish*, and I change the channel, because they do stuff that, that I think is condescending and annoying. Yes, really, it's like, what are you trying to communicate when someone ... Your wife just has, have a kid, and you're supposed to be helping with the other kids, and you're the one falling apart.

In these comments, Malik captured a common thread that was found among a number of fathers across all three groups. Nearly all of the fathers used various techniques to challenge or overcome broadcasted televised media messages that did not align with their experiences as Black fathers. Fathers' responses surrounding how mindful they were about the depictions of Black fathers in the media and the various techniques that they used to challenge such inaccurate images closely aligned with the social cognitive theory of mass communication. In spite of the participants' wide range of perspectives, fathers still made it very clear that *Tyrone* and *Larry* were not likely to be portrayed on television. Regardless of that, these men still reported finding both of those photos more relatable because they captured who they were as fathers.

Jaime, a married father of two—who introduced himself to the group and then shared his gratitude to be in a space with other Black fathers—described the photos of *Tyrone and Larry* as "intimate pictures and depictions of fathers with their child like connected, physically connected you know, to their child." Jaime then discussed how he could personally relate to those fathers—in particular *Tyrone*—as he was a huge advocate of skin-to-skin touch. Recognizing the social-emotional benefits of connection for infants, Jaime shared how he routinely offered his children connection through skin-to-skin touch, and even encouraged other men to do the same with their children:

> …Skin-to-skin contact, which is the most intimate form of bonding, you know. And we've talk about that before, you bring kids in life. I mean, I was a big component of... strip everything off you have, fathers, when your kid ... When your child comes into the earth or to the world with that skin-to-skin contact. So, this is, I think, like sort of the consummate, intimate you know, photo. Um, and yeah, this sort of, all of the beauty of a Black father, particularly a Black husband, that this represents is to me, stood out to be the least likely that we're going to see on a regular basis in media.

While many fathers grouped *Tyrone* and *Larry* together as Black fathers who were less likely to be portrayed on television, some participants indicated that separately either *Larry* or *Tyrone* may or probably would have been on television for very specific reasons such as commercials or other marketing strategies (Table.1).

You might see Larry on a Cheetos or a Cheerios commercial. Although fathers conveyed that they do not typically see themselves engaged in domestic tasks or portrayed in a positive light on television, a majority of them felt that *Larry* may have been shown on TV in certain situations including a sales pitch or through other marketing techniques that could increase viewership. Members of two of the three focus groups linked the photo of *Larry* to commercials, describing how they felt media would use his image as an attempt to get the fathers to purchase something. Participants even identified specific advertisements, in which they felt they had seen a similar image as *Larry's* being used or could see it being used. Brandon, a father expecting his third child, felt that he would see someone like *Larry* in a Cheerios commercial. He said:

> Brandon: You might see Larry on the, uh, uh, on a Cheetos or a Cheerios commercial.
>
> Aaron: Coffee commercial or something.

Luther: Yeah that's what I was gonna say.

Brandon: RIGHT

Other fathers supported Brandon's comments and described other commercials in which they felt *Larry* may be featured. Another father in a different group felt that *Larry* could have been in a Swiffer commercial as a strategy to increase their Black consumers. Malik specifically thought "this would be for advertising, to expand their clientele." Jeremiah considered almost selecting *Larry* as most likely to be on television because he saw that photo as a possible ad but changed his ranking to "probably would be on television."

Many fathers across all three groups appeared to share a common understanding that the portrayals of African Americans in media were not controlled by an "insider's" perspective and were often determined by people in power. They felt that the lack of control over their narratives was part of the reason their depictions were so limited and distorted. In the focus group that consisted of three fathers, Zion and Jaime went back and forth discussing this particular notion. Zion suggested that it was not by happenstance that negative photos of Black fathers are most likely to be portrayed on television. It is because of who is in control of the media. Zion said,

Zion: Yeah, and again I don't think any of it is by happenstance.

Jaime: No.

Zion: It's by-

Jaime: Who's running the media.

Zion: It's by design-

Jaime: Black folks and the media.

Zion: It's about who's in control of the narrative. Then again, who's in control of the media.

Jaime: It's the reason why-

Zion: Who's pushing it?

Jaime: Yes.

Zion: And again, that's why I said that picture because it's not always just about words accompanying the visual. Sometimes it's just pictures. They put pictures out there, marketing. Oh, uh, it's the Black doll, White doll. Uh, uh ...

Jaime: Oh, on the doll test.

Zion: ... experience. The doll test. And then even just the world's uh, beautiful, most beautiful baby, or the world's most beautiful woman.

Jaime: Smartest. Most beautiful. Yeah.

Zion: All of those are smart, like they depict all of these things and if you just ... Sometimes it's not always just about them accompanying the words with the narrative. They'll throw a picture out there, and then you, process that one way or another. And a lot of times, it depends on your experience like we saw with the pictures that we looked at, but again when they control the narrative, they plant subtle seeds in your mind forever. (laugh)

Using the doll experiment as an example for his group, Zion ended his comments by suggesting that media's attempts to send subliminal messages to its audience can leave a lasting effect. His group was not the only one that discussed who controlled the media. Another group spent quite some time discussing similar themes. Within that group, Malik summed up a large portion of the dialogue surrounding the roles that Black actors have traditionally been given, the lack of Black representation found in the media, and what makes for "good television" as follows:

> Cause at the end of the day, this is an industry we don't control. The executives make decisions based on the an- analytics and the, their focus groups, and what sells. We, African Americans are what, thirteen percent of the United States population? When they put things on TV, they are not only trying to get money from thirteen percent. (laughter) They're trying to get as big a part as possible so, they, they pick and choose and dissect it based on what will actually make for good entertainment and good TV and that's what they play.

Malik's comments prompted additional conversation about what has proven to be successful for White directors, and how that goes against the ways that these participants identify as fathers. For example, several fathers in this group described how they reacted to the television show *Empire*, addressing their dissatisfaction with the stereotypical portrayals of several of the characters including *Lucious*, the African American father. They recognized that this is a key example of White executives proving that they can, put people of color on prime-time television and do well, as the show is going into its fifth season. However, the question is at whose expense. Malik closed that conversation by observing:

> When you actually look at them, the two with the kids, the one Swiffering or the one vacuuming and carrying his kids (*Larry & Tyrone*). Those are pictures of what you're supposed to be doing. The other two are pictures (*Paul & William*) of what situations you shouldn't find yourself in and what you shouldn't be doing, and in the, in the age of media where they selectively pick the stuff that is catchy, that gets your attention, and normal things you're supposed to be doing doesn't make good TV.

In other words, *Larry*, an engaged Black father who is helping around the house does not make for good television unless he is being used as a sales pitch.

You're not about to see Tyrone and there's a lot of Tyrone's, too. A shared theme emerged among many of the participants as they gave reasons for why *Tyrone*—an intimate photo of a Black father holding his infant—would not be shown on television. In one of the groups, a majority of the fathers adamantly declared that they would not see Tyrone on television in the following exchange:

Brandon: You sure ain't gon' see *Tyrone*?

Kevin: Right?

Brandon: (laughs).

Kevin: I ain't never seen that in my life.

Luther: (laughing) *Tyrone,* look kinda familiar.

Brandon: Come on, bro. (laughs) You not about to see *Tyrone*. There's a lot of *Tyrone's* too, 'cause *Tyrone* don't work right now, so *Tyrone* gon' take care of the house and baby.

Luther: *Tyrone,* you ain't gonna see him.

Brandon: You feel me? You're not gonna see *Tyrone*. No way.

Luther: He ain't gonna be just doing no dishes.

Each group concentrated on different reasons why *Tyrone* would not be on TV. Some of them included: fathers holding newborns were still not prevalent on TV; the depiction of a Black father within the home environment was counter to the current narrative; and fathers were not usually shown engaging in domestic tasks. Two specific participants from separate groups reported feeling that fathers were not typically shown with newborn babies on television. Jaime specifically stated "I gave *Tyrone* the fourth (ranking), least likely because it's a newborn, obviously. Or certainly younger than walking age." This comment was comparable to Luther's

explanation, where he stated, "And another reason why I put *Larry*... I mean *Tyrone* for three (third ranking) is, they don't really show us too much holding babies like that."

Though Luther ranked *Tyrone* as a father who may be on television, the rest of his focus group ranked him as a father who would not be televised. In a joking manner, the participants in Luther's group used *Tyrone* to speak to the double standards society holds against Black men. All of the fathers in this group agreed that *Tyrone* was a Black father taking care of his home and children, while the child's mother was at work. In other words, he was perceived as a stay-at-home father. Furthermore, a majority of the men in this specific group shared that they too could relate to his photo, having been stay-at-home fathers. This conversation quickly led to fathers discussing some of the struggles that Black men experience with employment and other stereotypes. As the only father in his group that ranked *Tyrone* in third place, Luther expounded on his belief that the media might display *Tyrone's* image, simply to indicate that he, as a Black man, was not working. Luther explained:

> Because they showing that this man ain't at work. (everyone laughs) Doing stay-at-home dad type of stuff. So yeah, if you ain't working, making that bacon, bringing it back to the table then, uh, you at home while baby's [his spouse] at work. Doing well what he's supposed to be doing.

Other participants chimed in to explain how a Black man not working is portrayed negatively. They shared that Black fathers are not simply perceived as stay-at-home fathers like White fathers; instead, they are seen as men who are not able to take care of their responsibilities. Fathers' responses closely aligned with the critical race theory in that their experiences were centered on race. Luther's conversation continued with Brandon saying:

> Brandon: At home ain't getting no money

Aaron: And that's portrayed as bad.

Luther: Yeah.

Brandon: Yeah. To America, when it's a Black dad, but when it's a White dad, he's just a stay-at-home dad.

Luther: Yeah.

Aaron: Yeah. I had my time.

Luther: Yeah.

Brandon: Real talk. I had my at-home dad time.

Aaron: So, I go hard about that.

Brandon: For real!

Aaron: It's got to be done. Yeah and there's points in time where look how small they are.

Kevin: Childcare is expensive, you can get a second house for the price (of it).

Brandon: Who else gon' clean the house. She ain't about to work and clean the house! That's what she's not doing.

This exchange led fathers to express their willingness to work as a team with their children's mother, making the smartest decision for their household. In some cases, that meant participants stayed home with their children, while their spouses went to work. Aaron summarized this particular dialogue by suggesting that the household task was not gender specific; it was about who was able to bring the most income into the home to ensure that the family was taken care of.

In the other two focus groups, fathers spent time sharing how they could relate to *Tyrone* and the connection he had with his infant. Zion, shared that "the last one is *Tyrone…,* who's suds it up with his baby in a baby Bjorn, which I've been that guy. I've been *Tyrone.*" Similar to the photo of *Larry,* fathers were able to see themselves in that photo, yet they recognized that it

would not be an image that media would portray because it conflicts with the stories that have been told about Black fathers. A few fathers reported that *Tyrone* may be on television, as a joke. One participant suggested that *Kevin Hart,* a Black comedian, may be seen depicting a *Tyrone.*

I was laughing at brother Z 'cause ours is exactly the same. Prior to Jaime sharing the ranking of his photos, he laughed and explained how he arranged them in the same exact order as Zion. He said "Man, um, and I was laughing at brother Z 'cause ours is exactly the same. Um, yeah, for me, one to four, *Paul, William, Larry, Tyrone*…" Although Jaime found it surprising that Zion's and his photos were in the same arrangements, their ranking sequence (*Paul, William, Larry, and Tyrone)* was common among all three groups; nearly half of the participants in the entire study ranked their photos in that order. Another theme that emerged among all participants was identifying either *Paul or William* as one of the two images that was most likely to be seen on television. Fathers chose these men because of their stereotypical images, suggesting that *Paul* represented issues with the law and *William* indicated separation or the absent Black father. Though not all fathers saw the exact same depiction for *Paul and William,* there was a number of similarities across the three focus groups.

Black man, frayed shorts, cell phone, hat tipped, hoodie. And police. That makes sense. David, one of two participants in a focus group who ranked *Paul* as most likely to be on television—while the rest of his group selected *William*—explained his logic:

> Yeah I think also with *Paul* is kind of his appearance…. traditionally, um, all of the movies that featured African American males, um, they always seemed to like, dress down. Almost as if it was like saying that there's an immaturity inherent in Black males and that, uh, that's something that has always connected with me.

After disclosing that *Paul's* attire stood out for him, David indicated that Black men have often been depicted as dressing in an immature manner with a cell phone attached to their hip. He explained further how the media has conditioned him to see African American men in that way. David said, "um ... It's, it's an image, um, that is burned into my brain. I think that's why I think I would see that more on television." To summarize his point, David revealed that he didn't even notice the child when he first looked at the photo. This sparked cross conversation between David and Jeremiah as they discussed the difference having a child in the photo made:

> David: I think honestly when I first thought about it I didn't even think about the fact that the kid was in his hands. It was kind of just like, oh yeah, Black man, frayed shorts, cell phone. Hat tipped up a little bit. Hoodie. And police. That makes sense.
>
> Jeremiah: If you take the kid out I would have put that first too. Just for, just for what you're saying. The look. Um, definitely.

Jeremiah who ranked *Paul* as would not be on TV, believed that media would not portray a Black father carrying his child in front of police officers. At the same time, he did believe that media would depict an aggressive Black man interacting with law enforcement. In other words, the child was the very reason that Jeremiah did not rank *Paul* as most likely to be on television. He stated:

> The reason why I have *Paul* last is because a lot of the police and African American males that I see [on the television], usually the kids are not with the, the dad. Usually the dad or the guys are up front, being very, you know, boisterous or you know, combative, or they're engaging or they're speaking or whatever.

A common thread among several other fathers that ranked *Paul* as most likely to be on television was their belief that media would portray the stereotypical aggressive Black man. Many fathers were aware that Black men are frequently feared and attributed that to the ways that they have historically been depicted. Malik, a third father from Jeremiah's and David's group explained why he thought *Paul* would be most likely to be on television:

> I chose *Paul* (as) number one because there's a stereotype about the African American male being uh, more aggressive than the, than the uh, White male in the sense that if you have, if you put two people in the same situation, right? And you have the cops go talk to them and say hey, this, these two people are doing the same exact thing, and you put the same cop to go actually go talk to them, the way the cop actually approaches it is completely different.

Malik addressed both the stereotypes of the Black man and the inequalities that these particular men face due to their race. He then illustrated how *Paul* would have been shown on TV with his young child and the police officers, as a means to depict a Black father who decided to break the law in spite of his young child. He suggested that media would convey that Black fathers inherently are not responsible enough to make good decisions even when their children are around. Malik elaborated:

> So, in this case this would probably present a picture way of telling, of showing something that says in spite of him actually having his kid, he still went ahead and did XYZ. But now it's a resolved situation, you have the, you have the law enforcement actually there to make sure he's obeying orders, or following instructions.

The presence of the police officers in *Paul's* photo seemed to be the focal point of a majority of the participants' decision to rank him as most likely to be portrayed on television--

particularly in the other two focus groups. Brandon, the only father within his group who did not rank *Paul* as most likely to be on television passionately declared, "You'll see *Paul* on TV all day." Brandon's facetious, yet serious tone sparked a response of another father who said "Yeah, that's CNN". The common argument in this group was that *Paul* represented issues with the law. Luther, a father of two, made some comments that prompted responses from three other participants:

Luther: Oh he got some kind of a illegal situation going on where looking like *Paul*, he about to get taken in or someone got taken into custody. He went on got the baby. It could've been bad.

Kevin: It's generally what you see.

Luther: It could have been bad, uh, I mean there ain't north-, you don't really see too much good stuff going on with the Police right there, like that. Well you know coming from our aspect.

Aaron: Personal experience, I never ever been around this many police at once...

Brandon: And it be something good. Like.

Aaron: And I'm just …

Luther: Right.

When fathers were asked to elaborate on why they ranked *Paul* as most likely to be on TV, many of them reasoned that because he was going to jail and typically that is how Black men are portrayed. Later within the same discussion, Brandon, a father who found joy in volunteering in his child's school, said that he could relate to the ways that African American fathers were portrayed on television. He had spent some time in jail when he was younger, and

he immediately connected his time within the system to media's representation of Black fathers. He shared these thoughts with the group:

> I've been in and out of jail since I was 12. You know what I'm saying? Like literally. Like this is my cousin right here like literally since 12 years old. You know what I mean? I just got off probation in 2015. No, 11. I been on it since I was 12. You know? I've always had some kind of people in my life telling me what to do, what not to do. I've been in prison three times. You know? Like I had my kid right before I went. You know? I had a kid right when I got out. And I've been out since 2013. You know? Last time I went, I went on false pretenses you know? But I had to take that. I had, I had to swallow that pill. And sit down for a few years just to know that I was gonna get back to my kid.

When specifically asked how he related that back to the ways that African Americans fathers were portrayed on television, he responded:

> Because. Every time you see them (on television) they're, they're either in, either going to jail or getting out. You know what I mean? And I know what that feeling is like. You know? I know what it feels like to have everything took from me. You know? Even when you feel like it shouldn't be. You know how. I know what it's like to be an innocent person locked up. I know what it feels like to be guilty and just have to go ahead and take that. You know? And I know what it feels like to be ripped from your kid's life. So yeah.

In essence, Brandon felt *Paul* would most likely be on TV because Black fathers were only portrayed as men who were either going to or getting out of jail, and he could personally relate to this possibility because of his own experience.

Beliefs expressed by Brandon mirrored those of Zion from another group. Consistently throughout the interview, Zion pointed out that media only portrayed Black men as superheroes

or criminals: “Like either we are LeBron James, or we're going to jail, and there's no middle ground.” He originally thought that *Paul* would probably be on television, but changed his opinion while providing the following explanation to the group:

> Um, for me, I put number one as the one of the brother's standing outside the car and wondering what that is with the baby inside, and the barrier in between 'em. Um, number two, I put the police in the background mainly just because even though this brother looks like he's actually being a father, just the visual of police in the backgr- somewhere around Black men, Black bodies, um, is definitely gonna be on TV and in fact uh, might put that ... Matter-of-fact, I'm going to reverse that. I think that would-be number one, and the other one would be number two. Um, well the one with the police would be number one, and the one of the brother in the car, number two.

Despite originally placing *William* first, after thinking about it Zion changed it to *Paul* and stated the police presence made all of the difference. Although Zion’s group was the smallest (n=3), they spent the most time discussing *Paul’s* photo in relation to Black bodies, policing, and the messages that are received from media. They agreed that *Paul* was being a good father by removing his child from whatever action was either about to or was taking place. Yet, they still thought the photo sent negative subliminal messages about Black men and the police. Jaime explained why:

> The first one, with the police in the background, even though this brother is being a father and he, he obviously didn't have anything to do with why the police are there, because they would be all over him. I'm sure they'd be all over him, but you just see that type of imaging where they, it's just a subtle, you know, message like police around Black bodies.

This group ended their conversation with comments that the images of the police overshadowed anything positive that Black people are engaged in. Jaime summarized these thoughts:

> *Paul* with the, with the police ...I think this intimate picture of a Black father, even a Black man with a child, um, it's just undermined. Y- you know what I mean? I think it's just so ingrained in our psyche that it's just, that it's just that moment gets undermined with the background. I'm looking at, you know, uh, one of my first observations was what I assumed to be um, riot gear helmet… And you know, you know these officers don't have guns in their hands. My mind immediately went to the helmet, and what I assumed to be zip-ties, even though they are in somewhat peaceful posture. You, you, again, and the way I process this, the brother just becomes irrelevant because I'm looking at, um, I, I immediately went to study them (police officers).

Feelings of being irrelevant, disengaged, and overshadowed by the presence of police were common among a number of fathers across the different groups.

Another image of a Black father being disconnected from his child. While a majority of participants ranked *Paul* as most likely to be on television, the remaining fathers rated *William* as most likely. Regardless of the rankings, nearly all of the fathers believed that *William* represented a Black father who was disconnected from his child. Throughout the various groups, discussions of *William's* photo led to current narratives about the absent Black father generated by "outsiders." Commonly throughout the focus groups, fathers believed images like *William*, an African American father separated from his child, are continuously replayed in media. Brandon ranked *William* as most likely to be on television because:

> Man, bro. You see this every single, every single movie, and there's a Black guy with a kid. He's losing the kid. Mom's taking him. Child, the child services is taking him. Jail

> taking him to jail...Yeah. Know what I'm saying? Like he's losing the kid, somehow, some way. He's losing the kid.

Brandon went on to explain that he specifically placed *William* in that spot because it appeared that the dad was losing his son, which was what he witnessed on television daily. Three other fathers in the same focus group agreed that Black fathers were always portrayed as losing or not wanting to be in their children's lives. But, this was the complete opposite of their experiences as they proudly announced being physically present for their children and engaged in cherishable moments with them. *William* also was considered likely to be on television because media continuously portrayed Black fathers as being the cause of broken homes. In a joking manner Brandon, who declared being a good father was the most important thing to him, suggested that whenever a Black father is shown on television "they play sad ass music (laughs). It's getting dark all of a sudden. It was just…, sunny now [it is] raining." He implied that Black men being absent from their children's home is so ingrained in media that there is a recurrent storyline to demonstrate it. Although Luther, another member of Brandon's group, agreed that Black fathers were routinely shown losing their children, he ranked *William* as not likely to be on television because the image demonstrated too much compassion. Convinced that media does not typically show Black men having compassion, he could not imagine such an image on television.

Participants from the other two groups also explained their theories behind *William's* photo. Reiterating that the image represented separation, Terrence, a father of two who declared how much he cherished his time with his children, felt the photo also exhibited the stereotypes that went along with separation such as child support. He specifically stated:

> Um, at least for me it just shows separation. I have a, a step kid, stepchild son I still call him son. But just sometimes separation of how the kids are always not in, the father's not

> in the home consistently, um, and all the stereotypes that come with that alone. Child support, all the different things that come with that so, I see this, I see like, I see a Law & Order kind of thing with this as well. How, just the separation between kid and dad.

Jaime, a father from another group, had a similar response to Terrence. He addressed the scrutiny that Black fathers endure because of many stereotypes that stem from people outside the African American community. In the following explanation, he implied that these individuals may see *William* through a completely different lens:

> And then this other one, again just a barrier between the brother and his son, and it, you know, it's, it's, it's ill, how you can look at pictures and people see totally different things because I can imagine White folks looking at this picture and being like, "Oh, there's always a reason why they ain't caring for their kids," or whatever. And it could be something, you know? Obviously, this brother cares for his, and it looks like he's having a hard time with that.

Jaime was able to see *William* as a father who was struggling to leave his son. Being privy to insights that recognize that images such as *William* go beyond what meets the eye was also suggested by several other fathers. Despite what media may say about William, these fathers thought the image demonstrated how hard it is for this father to leave or say goodbye to his child. They provided different scenarios for what could have actually been taking place in this photo, some involving the struggle that this father appeared to be going through. Yet all of the participants were very clear that the father in the photo would have been judged as careless or irresponsible, and the message that would have accompanied such a depiction in media would have been separation.

Zion, a member of Jaime's group, reflected on his response to the photo and was disheartened by his own initial reaction. Zion immediately thought *William* was not consistently present in his child's life. He said:

> Oh. This one particularly, when I first saw it, um, it, kind of tugged at my heartstrings a little bit. I don't know why I assumed the worst. And maybe it's because that's what's been fed to me, but ...I just assumed that he wasn't getting in the car and leaving with them. I, can't imagine that. Well, I won't say I can't imagine, but, in my mind, I immediately, the fir- ... I didn't assume that he was uh, pumping gas, so to speak and that he was gonna get back in the car and leave with this young one. It seems to me like these were goodbyes.

As he processed why he ranked the photo as such, he questioned his original reaction to *William* not leaving with his child. After a short reflection, Zion attributed his reaction to the messages that media continuously conveys about the role of Black fathers. He stated:

> And, um, so again, it tugged at my heartstrings because that's a soft spot for me, and mainly because of um, the reason that I just said is that we're fed so much bull droppings when it comes to Black fathers (laughter), we're fed and portrayed. um, in a way as such. You know, if you're fed anything over and over and over and over again, the strongest and the most strongest-minded of people will, in the back of their mind, question things. You know what I'm saying? And they will be like, "Oh man, is that, you know?" It ... That's why controlling the narrative is so important, but, just to get back to answering your question, um, me in particular, when I saw this picture, I assumed it was goodbyes and it wasn't, um, like the journey wasn't carrying it on after this picture.

Zion reinforced the importance of recognizing who controls the narratives and the types of messages that they are fed. Zion essentially filled in the narrative for this photo based on what

dominant culture has fed him. Cameron, from a different group, also spoke about the narratives of Black fathers from a historical perspective by saying:

> ...So when you're talking about based on media or shows or movies I ranked this one here (*William*) because I see this in a lot of shows. Historically, this is what I see-separation between a father and his child. A Black father and his child, mostly a Black father and his son most of the time.

We might not be married, but we're still engaged. Jeremiah described how careful he and his wife were about the type of television that they watched, reporting primarily watching positive Black shows, and how engaged Black fathers were in their children's lives. Building on another father's reference to the CDC study, he explained:

> Now there was another study that said we do engage more and maybe not in the traditional sense, but that data said it only had like 10,000 question- like, uh, uh, interviewees, it- so I don't know if that's really a fair population of the total Black community. But it was positive to say that yeah we might not be married or in, but we're still engaged.

After first making the statement that Black women still made up the largest demographic of single mothers—which he made very clear that he did not take lightly—Jeremiah provided additional information about Black fathers' engagement, pointing out that yes, Black fathers may not be married, but they are still certainly engaged in their children's lives. This common theme emerged among most of the fathers in this study, as they suggested that they were *Larry and Tyrone,* and that the other Black fathers they knew, married or not, were also very active in their children's lives. Some fathers extended the conversation by challenging the media's portrayal of them as Black fathers and members of the Black family. Cameron was one of those who did so,

and described the Black family as far more stable than media portrayed. Cameron thought society had two separate norms, one for the Black community and another for America in general. He stated:

> The norm for us, is different than the norm for I would say most of the world and America. Because I don't know how everyone else grew up, I grew up in both these situations where I've seen separation and I've seen stability. And I just think we need more stability shown because I think things have changed. I don't, I think there are more fathers in kids' lives these days because of how they were treated probably growing up, like myself, um. I can never be away from my child. So, I would always want them to see that.

In these comments, he suggested that there are more stable Black families than is shown in the media. Cameron wanted his children to see more stability represented in media's portrayal of the Black family. He said his children loved the TV show *Black-ish* because they were able to see an image of their family with both parents being represented.

Cameron's comment that "I can never be away from my child" was echoed by almost all of the other fathers in one way or another. These fathers declared how much they loved, enjoyed, felt pride in, and were dedicated to their roles as fathers. Although they recognized that media created an incomplete portrayal of Black fatherhood to the rest of the World through the limited and distorted depictions of them, many of them continued to place their focus and efforts on protecting and providing for their young children. They explained how important it was for them to ensure that their children were being exposed to the complete picture of Black fatherhood, and for fathers to do everything they could within their own home to support their children. David summarized these arguments by saying:

> So, all these people are having an incomplete picture of Black fatherhood including us. But we're making sure our kids are getting a complete picture. We're doing everything we can at home to make sure they're getting a complete picture.

Key factors influencing Black fathers' understanding of their fatherly role

> *We all agreed that the two pictures that were of the men at home with his kids (Larry & Tyrone) was us and that's who we really are. But we also admitted that we don't see that on television and then we thirdly admitted, but we still watch television. We watch Black television. —David*

In the middle of his focus group, David summarized several big themes that emerged. He restated that the participants in his group saw their interactions as mirroring *Larry and Tyrone,* and that fathers did not see themselves on television; yet, many of them still watched it. To combat some of those negative depictions, fathers chose to watch positive Black shows and be aware of what and how much television they consumed. They used other strategies to combat negative presentations of Black fathers such as watching television shows that were palatable to them, only tuning in to the nightly news once per day, and watching TV for entertainment purposes only. Two fathers in the study reported not watching television at all because they felt such entertainment was harmful to outsiders' understanding of who they were as men. David explained:

> And so, we're basically consuming what's even palatable for us, um, and I'm like Malik, I'm like kind of ... For me, the reason I don't watch it is cause I get to this place where I'm like, is this, am I just being entertained and ... But is this entertainment something that, because we're giving other people a false sense of what it means to be Black. And so

> they're getting a glimpse into what it means to be an African American, but they're learning things that we just all said. The complete picture is not on television.

Several other fathers noted how these incomplete portrayals impacted the ways that others perceived and interacted with Black fathers. For example, Zion discussed the disconnect between the Black community and law enforcement. He recognized that many White police officers have never interacted with Black people prior to their employment, and know very little about the African American population beyond what is shown on television. This creates a huge problem when officers encounter Black men at work because all that they have seen on television is negative depictions. Zion said:

> Police. Again, some of these ... A lot of these police have never had to interact with Black folks and it, it goes back to my initial point of the day. Like a lot of them have never had to come in contact with us, and literally have to get to know us and spend time with us, finding out what kind of people we are. So, if all they think we are is who's portrayed on the news, of course they're gonna approach us a certain kind of way, right?

Many fathers reported either being conditioned to see things a certain way or that society has been conditioned to view them in a way that is detrimental to Black fathers' existence. Jaime used the death of Trayvon Martin as an example. He believed that George Zimmerman's actions toward Trayvon were influenced by media's portrayals. He said, "Nor do I believe that…sucker ass, George Zimmerman wasn't influenced by these depictions of Black men that caused him to murder that brother."

While some fathers discussed the ways that media had conditioned them to view Black men, the depictions had not influenced their own roles as fathers. In fact, participants were adamant about not allowing media to dictate their role. Instead, several other factors were

influential in their understanding of what it meant to be a Black father. These factors included relationships with their own father, the impact of social fathers within their community, life experiences, and barriers that they have faced over time. Data related to each of these factors are presented next.

I didn't have to look to the TV or anything else to see what a father was. Several participants within the study referred to relationships with their own fathers as being influential to their understanding of a father's role. This particular element closely aligned with Vygotsky's theory and the wealth of knowledge that these fathers obtain within their home and communities. Many of them shared that television did not influence who they were because of the strong father-son connections that they had with their own parent. For instance, the richest and most influential bond that Zion experienced was with his own father, who taught him how to be a parent. Zion considered his father the best father that he knew. He said:

> ...my father being one of them, one of the most important and influential ones. Uh, so I had a present father from day one. Even though him and my mom weren't together, um, I don't have any memories of them actually of living in the same house, really, but they did when I was really little. But anyway, he was always still there, regardless. So there was never a time when I was without him, and I'm saying that to say I didn't have to look to the TV or anything else to see what a father was. My father was always there for me. He was always a stand-up dude…

Zion's father was always there for him in spite of his parents being separated. Referring to his father as a well-rounded Black male, Zion explained how this reality negated the portrayals of African American fathers in the media. He described why as follows:

> The depiction of us in the media didn't necessarily have, at least in ways that I'm conscious of, they didn't have much of an influence on me. Then or even now, just because I had who I thought was superman in my house, or I, I lived with my mom for the first 10 years of my life, and I lived with my dad for my formative years, which was like, which I called my formative years, coming into my own, but from 10 to 19 um, so I caught half and half. You know what I'm sayin'?

Several other fathers throughout the study were similarly able to turn to their own fathers instead of characters in the media to learn the role of a Black father. Jeremiah shared how he watched racially diverse fathers on television solely for entertainment purposes, being that his father was active. For him this was a luxury because, "from a sitcom on TV I mean I watch White dads, Hispanic dads, I mean George Lopez." Malik, another father from that group, described how his father parented differently than what he had seen on television. Seeing his father on a daily basis was so much more impactful for him than watching television to learn fatherly responsibilities. Malik said,

> So you end up ... the people you actually see on a daily basis and what happens in your house has a more- has a bigger impact on what you aspire to be when you become a dad as opposed to what you see on TV. Cause, when I was growing up my parents were disciplinarians and my parents didn't [play], this was when you did something, they would bring out the whip and whip you.

Reiterating the difference between what was presented on television and what actually took place in his home, Malik was more prone to engage with his son's teachers and schools in the same manner as his father did while he was growing up. In other words, he aspired to be the type of father for his children as his dad was for him.

While participants shared how important it was for their fathers to be present, they also expressed the significance of the actual amount of time and activities that their own fathers spent with them, and how they impacted their fatherly roles. For instance, Terrance's father taught him everything that he knew from fishing and ping pong, and now he teaches his children the same activities. Participants' reports of their own fathers taking the time to engage in activities that they enjoyed as children was a significant socialization and modeling pattern. Zion happily shared how his father was nearly at all of his sports games:

> But even when I was little, my mom and dad would say, I tell people all the time, I had count on one hand how many games my dad missed in my life, and I played baseball, basketball, and football from six until I was 18, and somehow, he was at my brother's games at the same time. I mean, my brother has the same memories as me. (laughter) It's like, I don't know, he was playing at totally different times, different places, but Dad was at my game, too, so.

Proudly reaffirming that he was able to count on one hand how many games that his father missed throughout his life, Zion's experience coincided with him being there for his children. However, this was not the case for everyone. Jeremiah disclosed that despite having both parents in his childhood home, his father missed a lot of important moments. Jeremiah reflected on what these absences taught him about his own fathering:

> So, one I wanted to come back to my man where, um, Cameron where it's like, um, different upbringing but one of the things that set with me is that my dad by the time I was around, I was the youngest, he was really into his career. And he was again, big in the community in a lot of stuff so he missed a lot of my games. So even though we had a different upbringing, that resonated with me. So, with him (referring to his son) I really

> try to be at like, all of his games and probably coach and all of that because um, because that is one of the things that I feel like I didn't get. And it- and it- and it definitely has an imprint still.

For Jeremiah, Zion, and a few other fathers, their personal relationships with their own dads supported their knowledge surrounding what it means to be a Black father. Zion, said he attends all of his children's games, while Jeremiah (whose father was present but missed a lot of his games) wanted to be at all of his son's games once his son was old enough to play organized sports to do the reverse of what Cameron's father had done in missing games. Reflecting back and remembering how it felt to look up in the stands and not to see anyone there proud of him was something that Cameron never wanted his children to experience. In other words, this influenced the ways that he showed up as a father. Cameron shared:

> You know, that didn't happen until I got to high high school and college. That was the time they got to see me play. So, there were a lot of years that [they] weren't there. So, I am there [for my children] thick and thin no matter what event it is, I don't care. I will be there. I will be coach; I will be anything. I- I gotta go coach a game after this. (laughs) So, um, that just let me know that I- I want to be in my kids' lives as much as I possibly can cause I don't want to miss a moment. Cause there's a lot of moments I know that my dad missed, of karate and baseball and um, the beginning of my football career, um anything that he- he just didn't get to see. Um and I know he, I know he regrets it.

Cameron ended this conversation reiterating how he never wants to miss any opportunities to support his children. Recently, talking with his own father, Cameron knew how much his father regretted missing a majority of their cherishable moments. As a father Cameron refused to experience those same regrets. Cameron's personal goal was to support his children in every

way possible. One commitment to meeting this goal was coaching his son's game immediately after the focus group.

In addition to the influential childhood father-son relationships, a few participants described the importance of their current connections with their fathers. Jaime's relationship with his own father was not always the strongest, but their bonds grew much stronger after Jaime had his own children. A shift in some fathers' lenses following the birth of their children was a familiar pattern in that they began to see things much differently. This new lens allowed them to strengthen their personal connections with their own fathers, and created another support system that influenced their roles as they continued to evolve as fathers.

There are men in the community who leaned into my life. Not all participants in the study reported having a solid relationship with their biological dad that supported their roles. For some participants their biological dads were not present, and this too affected their own parenting. Two participants from separate groups mentioned how the absence of their own fathers made them question their parenting skills. Kevin, a father who was adamant about setting his children up for success often worried about how to discipline his children because:

> That's what I'm saying, like we were. I feel like I'm starting from scratch, and I guess the next one of the things that really hit me [when] becoming a father is that I feel like I started from nothing. Because I realized that a lot of other fathers, if you come from a strong family background regardless of race there's a tradition handed down what you do about discipline. Is it right? Am I going too far? Is this too harsh on my kids, you know?

Similarly, David, another father in a different group, expressed not wanting to fail his children because it was his responsibility to lead his family, but at times he was uncertain what exactly that meant. Both David and Kevin had Pastors who served as their social fathers within

their community. Kevin explained that "Like some of that I had to learn sometimes I had to ask [for help] from my pastor like hey what about this and that? But I had to go actively look for help way outside of my like box, right?" The influence of social fathers on participants' understanding of their fatherly role was a huge factor for all fathers regardless of their relationships with their biological dads. While some participants reported having to search for this supportive fatherly relationship, for others those connections always existed. Common for all participants was the fact that nearly all social fathers had stemmed from relationships with extended family members such as uncles, cousins, and stepfathers.

Participants across the entire study acknowledged the significant role that other men played in their lives--particularly pertaining to their fatherly roles. For instance, Brandon described the critical role that his uncle played in his life prior to joining the army. Having a fatherly figure there was something Brandon deemed necessary, and he went on to share how he was doing everything in his power to ensure that his children would always have him around. Knowing how it felt not to have his biological father present was an experience that he did not want for his own children. Luther explained the difference between a father and a dad. During his explanation, he also shared that he too had a father role model in his life even though his father was not present:

> Father don't mean dad. Dad don't mean father. It doesn't have to be a biological to have raised you. I agree with you guys that you didn't have your fathers there but I'm almost certain that you had some sort of male figure 'cause you wouldn't know how to be or represent what a man's supposed to be. Right.

Luther's mother's partner was present in his life from birth to eighteen. Brandon chimed back in to say, "We've all had the little, the little instances. You know what I'm saying? We all had the

increments of time where we had some type of man. You understand, the man to look up to." David, a father from another group, had a slightly different experience. He related his own experience to the uncle fathering his nephew on *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* because in his younger years, he went to live with his uncle in another state who was a judge, just like the television sitcom.

Social fathers influenced a wide range of participants, regardless of whether their biological fathers were present or not. For example, Zion reported having a strong loving relationship with his own father while also learning from his social fathering relationships that no matter what happened in his life, as a father he needed to be there for his children. He elaborated:

> I come from a family of fathers. The cats in my family take care of their kids. They rock with their kids, whether they with the mom or not, they going out of their way and a lot of them end up having custody of their children. That's just what I grew up with, seeing Black men take care of their kids. My uncles is a stand up dads, my brothers, my, my cousins, my, you know, my dad's dad even though I never met either one of my grandfathers, they were fathers, you know. And, and, my great grandparents like ... So, I grew up, I, I come from fathers.

Reiterating the power and impact of being surrounded by other positive Black fathers, Zion pointed out that these men were not perfect, yet they taught him that being an absent Black father was not an option:

> And let me just say that the fathers and the, the Black men were present. They weren't perfect, like we had dysfunction… So no, they weren't perfect, but I just learned from them being there, period, that not being there wasn't an option. And at the end of the day,

> we could work on everything else. But being there has to be the main ingredient today. And that's just what I got from it.

Aside from the extended family members having served as influential to these fathers, some participants also reported that men in the community other than family members had a positive impact on their fatherly roles. Jaime provided detailed descriptions on why he is offended by the term "single mother." In spite his parents being divorced, and him living with his mother, she still was not a "single mother." He was still connected to his father and had been blessed to have several other male role models within his community lean into his life. He said:

> The reason why I get offended by that term, though, is because there are men in the community that leaned into my life from all stripes. You know, I'm, I'm not a preacher's kid but you know, there's five pastors in my family. So, I'm, you know, very visible at church family here in, in the area. And um, and one of my, one of my most present mentors was the city's first Black optometrist who was our family eye doctor. And you know, gave me my first job when I was 12 years old, you, you know?

Repeating how connected he was to his biological father, Jaime still acknowledged how powerful it was to have other Black males within his community there to support him and his family. He went on to share:

> So, men like that really deposited into my life, you know. Um, and they stood next, next to my mom, you, you know? Um, all the while I remained connected to my dad. I mean, you know, I saw him every weekend, that kind of stuff. Um, and when I still think about, you know, um, and I'm speaking within a traditional like nuclear family like situation. Like um, you know, I can still think about, you know, I never went through what probably he went through, like where you know, my dad really pronounced me into

> manhood. I had to learn to fly. Because I know my mom, and she knows this too, she couldn't make me into a man. You, you know what I'm sayin'? So as I think about, like, how that has really landed on me in my, um, my uh, the way that I father, um, it's influenced one, how I relate to my children. And it's influenced how I love them both physically and like and emotional.

Overall, a majority of the fathers accredited social fathers in their lives for providing support that served as a safeguard so that they did not have to rely on television to understand their role. David summed up the conversation by declaring that he would be less convinced to do or try something new if it was suggested by a person on television in comparison to a person whom he admired like a public official, pastor, or his uncle.

Being prepared, it's not something that you can study out of a book. A few participants indicated that life experiences, not an instructional manual, really influenced their understanding of a Black father's role. They had to learn certain aspects on their own. Wilbert said, "Nobody, nobody, nobody taught me how to be a father (laugh) when growing up." He did not learn certain fathering techniques until he had his first child and simply started to try to play the role of dad. He wanted to give his children everything that he did not have, and that he was learning on the job. This was similar to another father in a different group who suggested that he learned more about his role by being a parent than watching one.

While only a few of all participants in the study attributed their learning about fatherhood to general life experiences, this factor was most common among the members of one of the focus groups. Dialoguing back and forth, fathers in this group concluded that there was no textbook to teach them about their unique journey to fatherhood; it was actually their life experiences that had a large impact on how they understood their roles. Aaron started this conversation:

Aaron: Like you was saying, being prepared, it's not something that you can study out of a book.

Luther: Right. It aint no textbook

Brandon: It comes with life experiences, man.

Kevin: It's true.

Aaron: It comes from a lot. I live it. I live with it to teach you.

Brandon: It comes with experience, man.

Luther: Yeah there's like a, a, in my terminology there's a um stages in life that we go through.

Kevin: It's true.

Luther, the father who insisted that there was no textbook for Black fathers to learn their role, described how he envisioned stages of fatherhood development. Reiterating that life experiences guided men through each one of their stages, Luther explained:

> We go from being an infant to a baby, into a boy or a girl, and then if that's before us being men. We go from boys then we gon' be a male, then we gon' be a man then after you become a man you gotta become a dad, and then after you become a dad you gotta be a father because a dad and a father is two different things. That's (what) people don't realize in real society, the father is the one that stays through all circumstances and situations and takes care of his kids. The dad is the one who can make one and break. I'm outta here. I'm done.

Distinguishing the difference between his view of a father and dad, Luther suggested that each of these stages taught him something about fatherhood. Acknowledging that fathers were the men who stayed in their children's lives and took care of them, the participants in his group were

adamant about relating to a father's role as they were all actively involved in their children's life. The big takeaway that a variety of fathers learned from their daily life experiences was the importance of "being there" for their children.

So, I can't mimic any of what I see on TV to show me what to do or how to be a father. The final factor that participants declared as being influential to their fatherly roles was the unique barriers that they faced as Black men. They identified a wide range of obstacles that could be grouped into two categories. The first category consisted of general gender-based barriers such as being treated as a secondary parent. The second category of barriers related specifically to race, such as current and historic oppressive systems and survival techniques. These race and gender barriers were often connected back to the ways they made meaning out of their roles as fathers. For instance, being treated as a secondary parent was a common theme among one particular group of fathers who said that their roles were often discredited by social service programs, the child support system, and sometimes even schools. Some insisted Washington was "a women's state," and they (as men) were at the mercy of their children's mothers. This meant that they were only allowed to parent as far as the child's mother or the child support system permitted. This perspective was conveyed in conversations like the following:

Aaron: I-, it, it's just the- ... I don't know. I'm all screwed up when it comes to like TV and, and media and, and the real at home, because like it's all circumstantial. It depends on what state you live in.

Kevin: Yeah.

Aaron: It depends on how many rights you have for your kid. 'Cause we're, we live in Washington, our kids are born here, so you've heard it's a women's state.

Brandon: Yeah, she get all kinds of things.

Aaron: So we can only go so far with what we say and, and do.

Brandon: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Already stacked against us

Aaron: So it's already ... That's crazy. That's, that's, that's, that's crazy. It's like you're damned if you do, you're damned if you don't. And they make it a point to say sign the birth certificate and this and this and that. And that's just a way for them to tax you on the-

Luther: Right. Child support.

Aaron: You know what I'm saying?

Brandon: Threaten you with the rights to your kid.

According to these fathers, mothers were offered a wide range of services, but the only resource for them was the child support system that reiterated that a father's role was to financially provide for his child. A few fathers also felt that the lack of resources geared towards them in general conveyed a restrictive and limited view as to what they had to offer their young children.

During this discussion, several participants reported feeling like they were in a lose-lose situation. As Aaron put it "It's like you're damned if you do, you're damned if you don't." He added this scenario in which his son was residing with him full-time, yet he was still hassled by the child support office:

I paid child support for my son, and he lived with me 100% of the time. I called the people, I was like do you guys wanna talk to him? He's right here. I mean, he's four months old, but I, I, I don't know, he can be goo goo ga ga, and the lady straight up tells me "Well, we're gonna still gonna issue your pay wages until we settle this case and if at

that point we decide that you shouldn't have been paying, we will credit you moving forward." So I just have to deal with you guys cutting my check?

Aaron was in fact financially and physically providing for his son. Yet, when he reached out to the child enforcement office, he was informed that his wages would continue to be garnished until his case was settled. This experience sparked comments from other fathers who felt the current system solely valued the voices of mothers. The resulting conversation was:

Brandon: Until she says something, until she says something.

Aaron: Oh she was right there too!

Brandon: Dude that's what they always say. That's what they always tell me. Like what?

Aaron: To make it even worse, 'cause like, like, I'm telling you need to sign every paper and write every letter you need to, because whatever happened here ain't right. Like this, like you said, is, is damned if you do, damned if you don't. You know?

Kevin: Yeah.

The child support system was not the only institution that these fathers considered a hindrance to their fatherhood roles. They also described obstacles that they encountered from other social service agencies such as the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program and some school districts. Their perceptions of the WIC program as being solely interested in mothers and not receptive to fathers made some participants feel like they didn't belong, and they questioned whether their roles as fathers included taking their children to WIC nutrition appointments. The following exchange illustrates these concerns:

Kevin: And at that time too. My wife was working so I was doing the WIC right? And every time I go in there they wait and be like, "Where's mom?" and I'm like "Oh, she's at work." But then it, I swear they be like looking around me like "Who are

you?" and like, "What do you mean? I'm dad." Like what the crap. Like am I not valid? Man. Come on.

Brandon: Right, why I can't come get it. My name is on…They always look past me. I give them the, I give them the folder and everything.

Kevin: Right. They give me the craziest look. Like am I not supposed to be here? Yeah. Like and this is ju-, and to the point ... I got tired of going to them, like man.

Brandon: I feel you.

Brandon and Kevin felt insulted and out of place as the WIC providers looked past them even after they explained who they were. For them the implicit message was that they were doing something wrong. In actuality, these men were active fathers trying to contribute to their family unit and support their households by taking their children to the WIC office while their partners were at work. When asked for clarification, both fathers reiterated their experiences:

Kevin: WIC, no. 'Cause WIC, because WIC you have to go to the appointments and, and then they weigh your children-

Brandon: And they always want the mom. I don't know why they always want the mom.

These fathers did not understand why they could not be a part of their children's WIC appointments as fathers, and they were tired of this type of scrutiny. So, they eventually stopped going altogether.

Finally, two fathers from that same group shared how they perceived school policies and negative judgement from school personnel to have influenced their roles. They observed improvements in their children's grades and behaviors at school when they were around versus when the mothers threatened to report behaviors back to their fathers. All fathers wanted to

volunteer in their children's school but realized once the school was aware of some of their previous mishaps with the law, they would no longer be accepted. Brandon shared:

> My son's school loves me they're like, "Hey man can you be on out P-," "I wish I could I want to too but I know you guys aint gon' accept me." You guys aren't going to accept who I am. You guys see who I am right now and you guys interacting with me and you guys interacting with me as a person, but once you see my background, you see a whole 'nother person and it's crazy how people can create a person from a piece of paper. They'll create a person like, "Oh my god." They even met you, they've been talking to you, they vibing with you and then they reading this paper and then like oh my god you're a criminal.

Brandon declared that he would love to be more active in his children's school and serve on the PTA, but once the school knew he had spent some time in jail it would view him completely different. In a joking manner, Aaron responded that the school officials' whole demeanor would change and they would say:

> Aaron: That's Brandooooooonnnnnn?
>
> Brandon: (laughs) I thought it was Brandon. That help made who you're talking to right now you know what I'm saying? They don't see it as that way they just see it as paper. The image that you already gave them, that's gone. That's gone.

The fathers believed that Brandon would be viewed as two completely different people and that the PTA would retract their offer. Brandon thought those mistakes helped him evolve into the person who they loved—prior to seeing his jail record. He considered these mishaps as contributing factors to him becoming the man that he was, but Brandon knew this would not stop

schools' negative judgement or unwillingness to have him around. After hearing Brandon's story, Aaron was convinced that something had to change:

> You know what I mean? As a father. And so it's like somewhere something's gotta change. Like I get it, your circumstances may be totally different you have people who go to jail for different reasons they come out rapist and all I get it you know what I mean? I totally get it. But at the end of the day, you need those different circumstances, you know, those different, uh, you know it just has to be different because like you said if they're not, the kids suffer.

In these comments, Aaron suggested that children are the ones who suffered the most when their parents are misjudged or prohibited from volunteering in schools. He acknowledged the need for schools to be safe (such as policies surrounding sex offenders), but took issue with their punitive policies surrounding petty crimes or being locked up for a crime that one did not commit. He felt that such crimes should not stand in the way of parents having an active presence in their children's school life. Aaron also described how he had to be creative to avoid being continuously overlooked when offering to go on field trips with his children's class. He finally just showed up to the public places where his sons' field trips occurred. It was important for Aaron to demonstrate how committed he was to his children. On another occasion he brought lunch to school for his son, and was pleased to see how proud the child was to see his dad there. Aaron described the event thusly:

> I pop up one day and he got this look on his face like surprise like, "Am I in trouble?" and then he's like dad's here and he's excited so like same thing. I don't know, are you in trouble or are you excited but really I'm just here bringing you lunch to be honest but, it's to see how it goes and to see what happens so when I noticed that and how big of a

> difference, it kind of frustrated me so much like okay I did my dirt, I paid my time, and I'm still dealing with it and it keeps hindering me from doing the things I want to do with my kids moving forward.

In closing, Aaron shared his frustration being hindered to participate in his child's school because of a previous petty crime for which he had already paid his debt too.

The other two groups spent more time discussing how historic and current oppressive practices were hindrances to Black fathers' role. Some of the topics included mass incarceration, war on drugs, housing policies, welfare reform, and survival techniques that Black fathers have had to establish as a means to be successful in the racially unjust U.S. society. Jaime explained how empowering yet demeaning Obama's Brotherhood initiative was. He felt grateful to see such a plan implemented and that President Obama's administration acknowledged the importance of Black and brown men. Yet, he was still offended by some of Obama's comments about Black fathers that he perceived to be negative and feed into the mainstream narrative. Jamie said:

> Yeah. Well, this is my thing. But I guess my point is this, you know, in this example that I'm raising up, for Obama to say, "Here in this historic initiative," no President in the history of the country put us in the public sphere and by virtue of making or using their bully pulpit to say, "You know, Black and brown men matter. My administration is going to, uh, commit to leadership and policy changes to support their lives because they matter." And yet in the same token, come with this message of ya'll ain't, fathering your kids, do better. That whole thing.

Again, Jaime recognized that Obama was the only President who has ever intentionally used their platform to verbalize that Black and brown men matter. Yet, Obama also still fell into the

distorted narratives about the absent Black father. By suggesting that these men were not good fathers, he felt President Obama's criticism of Black fathers was irresponsible given the policies that had been created to serve as roadblocks for these men. Jamie added:

> And I, I get it but it's like, if you just want to hang yourself to dry like that, you damn sure better be just as equally responsible in lifting up the poor policy choices from the past that were actually responsible for why this reality is actually in existence. Do you know what I'm saying?

These comments were an attempt to hold national leaders accountable for the negative impact that historic policies have on Black families, particularly Black fathers. Jaime argued that if President Obama was going to affirm the outsiders' narrative he should do something about the poor policies that had such a strong destructive impact on their communities—especially those policies that correlated with why some Black fathers lived outside of the homes. This theme resurfaced again later in Jaime's group as Zion challenged a different father who suggested that policies should be improved for all fathers. Being aware that certain policies specifically negatively targeted Black men, Zion argued instead that it would be great to have some policies that uniquely focused on the improvement of Black men to counter the effects of numerous policies that had been detrimental to them. On this point Zion and Wilbert engaged in the following exchange:

> Zion: I don't see nothing wrong with policies going for black men from time to time.
>
> Wilbert: Uh, I, I hear you, I hear you, but I,
>
> Zion: Lord knows they gone against us for a long time. (laughter)
>
> Wilbert: I know, but you can't look at like that, no more, it's not like that no more. It's just like we gotta ...

Zion: Oh, they're still like that bro.

Zion ended that particular dialogue by saying "we getting into the weeds, carry-on" to refocus the conversation. Wilbert confirmed that he agreed there were policies created that do not benefit Black men but he also believed that Black fathers should not continue to think of the policies in that way if they wanted to be successful. He believed that Black fathers should ignore everyone and everything including media as a way to combat the oppressive practices. He was the only father in the study who viewed obstacles in this way.

Shifting the conversation back to the policies that fathers deemed a hindrance to Black families, Jaime pointed out how common it was for depictions in media to misrepresent the Black community. To make his point he used "the face of welfare" in saying:

> You know? When, when I think about, when I think about that, I think about the impact of war, the impact of drug policy, the ... Like, like it's, it's so, to his point like, I can't help but think about these depictions and being so skewed, you know, and to go back to the '80s point, you know? That was when, you know, um, the welfare policy was under tremendous attack. If we know anything about welfare, we know that it was White women who were the face of welfare, but it was Black women who were demonized as the welfare queens.

This conversation quickly extended to how Black fathers never truly received credit for being there in spite of all the negative government policies (e.g., welfare reform) that attempted to keep them out of their children's lives and impacted their roles. Zion shared, "Again, we talk about the welfare system and how men couldn't be in the home if, you know, all, all of those, all of the different, you know, variables." Jaime added that historic barriers placed a lot of weight on the shoulders of Black fathers, imposing different standards on them. Acknowledging that Black

fathers were held to a completely different standard while already enduring unique barriers, Jaime said:

> "I take the more historical account. Like in the '80s, what I saw, I think about the, the brothers from the OJs to the little older fathers that were present in the neighborhood. Um, I think about what, what Black fathers and Black men were holding, like on hold. You know what I'm sayin'?"

He supplemented these observations with an example of the Cosby's sitcom as a "kind" offering to the inequalities that these men faced during that time. Extending this notion, he explained:

> So this like narrow, like narrative of Black fathers is never given its full due, y- you know. And so, frankly I look at, you know, the Cosby shows as um, charitable offerings of positive depict- depictions of Black men, 'cause those paled in comparison to, again, '80s baby, that's the Reagan era. We can't talk about the crack, right? From, for- forget like all of the ... Just the proliferation of, like crack in our communities.

Finally addressing what he referred to as the jail policy, Jaime personally provided a scenario from his own life growing up in Washington. He recognized that Black men were the single largest population to be hit by the war on drugs in terms of men who were locked up, but, according to him it was actually White men who were the highest consumers. He explained:

> And, you know, Black men being hit with the number one, as the number one peddlers of, of, of crack cocaine, you know, when White men, we knew is being here from Seattle, just across the bridge in West Rodham, I remember when I was in high school, remember hearing, like in high school, in the '90s, that White men were the highest consumers of crack cocaine or in cocaine in Mercer Island.

These comments were just one example of many policies Jaime thought negatively impacted Black fathers. Such policies led to Black men being arrested and sentenced at a much higher rate for the same crime which, in turn, interfered with their roles as Black fathers.

A majority of the participants knew that they were held to different standards and faced a wide range of unique obstacles because of their race. They sporadically disclosed various survival techniques that they used as a way to inform their roles. For instance, Kevin evoked cultural factors that were essential to surviving as a Black man and father in a U.S. society that continues to hold such double standards for Black people. His comments prompted Brandon and Luther to participate in the following dialogue:

Kevin: An ob-, an observation I've held too from generation to generation, especially in the African American communities, is there's a lot of survival techniques. That, that have popped up from generation. One of them is you always have to speak your mind, which is a-

Brandon: Yeah, it's cultural.

Kevin: ... you know, we could say it's a cultural norm, you know?

Brandon: Yeah! Don't hide it from nothing.

Luther: Yeah, you gotta have a backbone. Right?

Brandon: Yeah. Stand up.

Kevin: Yeah, you always-

Luther: Yeah. Stand with respect.

Kevin: But, but it's yeah. You see what I'm saying? Like. But if-, I-, it's always ingraining us with a-, no matter what wording is used, in one way or another it's, "Hey, you need to talk. This needs to come out." 'Cause if not. I mean if you look, if you go

back. If we didn't if, uh. As a culture if we didn't speak up, we were stepped on, literally robbed.

Luther: Right.

Kevin: All of the above, or even worse.

Brandon: And worse, treated like a victim. Because you victimized.

Luther: Yeah. If you don't speak on it, you don't know how to address it.

Kevin: You were literal, literally victimized. You could die like, you know they make. Whole communities were ravaged-

Luther: Right.

Kevin: For not speaking up. So-

Brandon: For real.

Kevin: You could see remnants of those survival techniques within the community

The three fathers discussed what they described as Black cultural norms used to survive in an unjust society.. Kevin suggested later in his group that it was possible to overcome barriers as a culture, but this did not negate the fact that they still faced very unique barriers.

Luther summarized the discussion by indicating that Black fathers were willing to take chances if the ends justify the means. Referring back to the four photos of the Black fathers, he used himself as an example, suggesting that he had been in all four situations, and in every instance, his focus was on his children. In spite of doing so, society would not understand the fathering decisions he made because its focus was placed on whether the means justify the ends. To underscore his reasoning Luther explained:

Um, with me um, I kinda of look at it as a, I just looked at men in every aspect th-, the father role from working to not working to going to school, being a student and so forth

> or just uh having to take a chance to be able to provide something for my kids that, uh, the reality of, of what they're showing on TV. I mean, I didn-, I can't say I, uh, can assume the role of each one 'cause I never really been, I ain't never been no drug addict, but, um, there's things that we do that we consider um acceptable but it wouldn't be acceptable to society i-, i-, it's saying that it's like, um, for us, uh, well a Black male father who's willing to take a chance is the ends justify the means, but for society the means justify the ends

A more well-rounded snapshot of African American fatherhood

When asked what they felt was missing from the depictions of Black fathers in the media, nearly all of the participants expressed a desire to see a complete snapshot of Black fatherhood. They were also adamant that current depictions of Black fathers were biased and generated a false notion that all African American fathers were absent from their children's lives. They recognized that some Black fathers were absent, but this was not the Black community's norm. That message was conveyed throughout the entire study as participants shared a wide range of examples of their own and other fathers' active presence in their children's lives. They also disclosed why they did not condone any Black fathers who were absent from their children's lives.

Protecting men who did not take care of their children violated the values of these Black fathers. As Jaime explained:

> And so I think that, that has a clear intersection with a Black narrative, at least a, a balanced Black narrative 'cause I don't take issue with raising awareness around Black men and Black fathers who don't father their children. I don't play that. Like that's, I don't believe in protecting wrong, but when that is the only thing that's being told, I got to take

issue with that, you know.

Holding Black fathers accountable for their responsibilities was a common response across all three groups. However, many of them also were outspoken about how media only portrayed Black fathers as deadbeats—which they identified as the larger issue. Recognizing that Black fathers are so much more than the limited distorted images have been consistently presented, members from Jaime's group yearned for the media to portray them as the fathers that they truly are. To capture their true essence, participants recommended that media portray Black fathers as more family-oriented, residing in the same homes as their children, and actively engaged on a daily basis with their children and in household tasks. Zion summarized this desire in the following comments:

> You know, the family that's just doing enough to get by and, and focused on family, not necessarily feeling like they have to be, um, super wealthy or anything like that. They're just happy with who they are in the presence of each other uh...

In addition to displaying the average Black family that enjoyed each other's company, Zion also described how he wished that media would seek to capture Black men's positive traits.

Community Oriented. One particular trait that Zion mentioned was the importance of community for Black men, as he acknowledged how actively involved he and others were in their neighborhoods. Knowing all that he personally puts into his community, Zion took issue with the fact that media only felt obligated to come to their neighborhoods either when something was wrong or during major events. Commenting on how the lack of coverage fed into the disconnection between the larger society and their communities, Zion said:

> But yeah, for me, I would just like to see us ... That and um, just more ... Again, we don't do things. Like I know the stuff that we do in the community, and whatever, we don't do

> it to get patted on the back, or to get media coverage or anything like that. But I wish they would show more that Black men and Black fathers do in the community positively. You know, they, they just don't show it, man (laughs). Well, they do when they have to, so like when they do the, the high fives they have to cover that because everybody's talking about it, right? So, at some point they, even if it's just a little paragraph, they have to mention it, some of that stuff, right? But there's so much that, um, that the Black community, and Black men specifically are doing. Just in Seattle, and Seattle's not even a really heavily populated Black area. So, I can imagine.

Disclosing that he could only imagine all of the positive things happening around the world with Black fathers based on how much happens specifically within his own community, Zion reiterated that it is by design that certain things were not shown on television.

Jaime continued to build on Zion's ideas, as he shared a story about a professional football player recently making an inaccurate statement about the Black Lives Matter movement not addressing Black-on-Black crime during a press conference when he was asked about Philando Castile, a Black father who was murdered in front of his daughter by a police officer for no reason. Jaime commented:

> The brother goes off and says, "Well, I don't see Black Lives Matter, you know, uh, uh, going on the streets, when Black-on-Black violence happens." And I was like, man, here is this brother, he's giving this press conference about 15 miles away from my hou- 10 miles away from my house, if even that. And I'm sitting here, like, he ... Would he be saying that if one, he saw the coverage of literally 'til this day ... The week before, I was part of three neighborhoods walks, down the street, Rainier Beach. Three. There was four that happened. I was part of three. And they were just neighborhood walks for peace

> organized by Black folks. The brother that runs Safeway down at Rainier Beach, he has got this group called uh, FAST: Fathers And Sons Together. He organized two of those things together. You know what I'm sayin'?

Highlighting a number of events that occurred in the athletes' backyard, Jaime wondered if there were media cameras or any other form of neighborhood coverage—which there were not—if this particular individual would have had a different response. Having reported that all four African American peace walks went on "deaf ears" as there was no media coverage, this particular athlete fell for society's bait and it resulted in him perpetuating a White narrative. Jaime added:

> Now he got, now he got hoodwinked. Now he's carrying the same narrative saying what, saying what these White folks saying on a daily basis ... One of their links is Fox News, right? He's now saying what Fox news is saying. Now you got this Black man, brilliant, beautiful, Black brother representing an anti-Black narrative. Now, you tell me how that math happens?

To sum it up, fathers in this group felt it was important for media to depict a much more accurate picture of Black fathers demonstrating all of the positive things that they were engaged in both within and outside of their households.

Stability. Another theme that emerged among several fathers in a different group was stability. The participants, wished that Black fathers were depicted as being more stable within their roles and homes. Having been immersed in the Black community, participants were privy to an insider's perspective, which they shared did not mirror the depictions of Black fathers on television. They reported that media's limited depictions of them prevented outsiders from seeing Black fathers for who they truly were. Participants reported that outsiders' current narrative neglected to portray Black fathers as humble men who loved and respected their

mothers, wives, and children. These fathers also mentioned that the current depictions omitted the large number of Black fathers who were in fact residing with their children. Furthermore, fathers wished that media would convey their fear of failing their families, and how much Black fathers truly relied on God. David, one of the fathers who shared these desires named another fear that some Black men have surrounding the inaccuracy of their depictions. That is distorted images' effect on their actual lives. He said:

> There was a study in like, I think it was like 15 years ago where the Black male was the most feared thing on the planet. You know, like, um, above sharks, guns and things and it was like, Black man. Um, and I think we're, um, I think there's a lot of fear in us that may not be depicted well. Cause we show it as, I'm afraid of losing my money, I'm afraid of, you know, losing stuff. Um ... there's a huge identity crisis, uh, amongst African American males, and I think sometimes the media portrays us as always super dominant, we know who we are, we know what we want. Um, we know what we want from our women, we know what we want from our kids, we know what we want from our jobs, bosses, um, from law enforcement.

David spoke in opposition to images of Black men as very dominant, scary, and only caring about money. He told his group that as a father, he was still trying to figure out the best moves for his family because he did not want to fail his children. He said:

> But I feel like a lot of us, if you got us in the right space would admit like, I don't know what I want. I'm still figuring that out. You know, like, I try to make, because for the sake of these children, I'm trying to be the superhero and act like I got it all together and I know where we're headed. But ultimately, I'm scared about every decision I make because I may be leading my family to more hardship, you know, and then I'm going to

be the one responsible for apologizing and figuring it out.

Demonstrating the love, compassion, and dedication that he had to his responsibility as a father, David recognized that he could have been another statistic either because of his rough start in life or as a Black man living in an unjust society. He ended his comment by reiterating that in his view, humbleness is a common trait of Black men that is generated by the daily experiences of just being Black. To support this premise he provided the following explanation:

> You know, a lot of us have made a lot of progress and even in this room we've, some of us that were born in situations that if you looked at statistics it would be like, oh man, I can tell how they're gonna end up. But we're like, the opposite of that. Like, we went the other way. We kind of forged forward, um, and some of us that get to speak in front of people. Of course, I can talk about my own achievements and how God has got me through, but not every African American male gets to do that. Um, but I know that that's something that could be depicted more in the media as well, is um, the pride we have in what God has got us through and what we've walked... The storms of life that we have walked through.

Several other fathers agreed and added that they wished media would show Black fathers going to counseling as a way to deal with the unique struggles that they face.

Finally, fathers in this group acknowledged that there is a wide range of Black men who have been completely omitted from media's depictions. They argued that too often Black fathers have been portrayed in very limiting ways regarding sexuality as well as their fatherhood and other factors have been systematically ignored such as shades, sizes, and abilities. Jeremiah, reinforced this notion and declared that television was missing Black fathers who were parenting children who are homosexual or Black fathers who identified as gay. Overall, this particular

group reiterated that African American fathers are not monolithic and homogeneous as media seems to suggest.

Scarifies. Similar to the previous group, the third focus group of fathers felt there were many worthy and needed images of Black fathers missing from media. Having revisited the four photos presented early on they felt *Tyrone's* image was absent from media, and more representations of active Black fathers were needed. Building on this concept they noted that the educated Black man is rarely depicted on television, and they wished that he was portrayed more often engaging in educational activities with his children. Aaron emphasized this idea in suggesting that there should be more views of Black fathers teaching their children, not just showing them playing some type of sports. He said:

> They never show a Black father teaching his kids anything he can use in life. They might show how to throw a football, baseball, or something related to sports, but as far as, uh, uh, building block that you're gonna need in life, they don't show us portraying that type of thing on teaching our kids nothing like that.

Other fathers in the group discussed the actual sacrifices that Black fathers make to be a part of their children's life, and how this was missing from television. As Aaron explained:

> Just I think it's like how much a Black father really sacrifice when it comes to their family and their kids versus I mean I don't know it's hard to speak on this without sounding racial or anything like that but it's like, it come-, like say for instance we come from our background and we know we didn't have so many things so we have no choice but to make x amount of sacrifices along the way to make certain things happen.

These viewpoints suggest that many Black fathers do not start with the same opportunities as many White fathers. Aaron also mentioned that the sacrifices that Black fathers make in order to

make ends meet or attempt to get in the same race as other fathers is never shown in the media. He provided an example for the group about him going to school and getting an education, yet still having difficulty with finding a good job. Other fathers in this group explored this notion in more detail as they reacted to each other's responses. Sitting around the table smiling, laughing, and joking, Brandon started the dialogue:

Brandon: I think just the strength and the loyalty we have to our kids and just making a better family you know what I mean? 'Cause like, I know probably all of us was not taught how to raise a family at all. From a man's perspective...It's just that I know my generation and a lot of my peers were a lot stronger men and loyal men to our families than, than ever had been portrayed in anything.

Kevin: I was gonna say that the nuances to fatherhood, to the subtle things, and I think, and I actually like the picture with-, of *Tyrone* 'cause it's, a lot of times it's the little things, right? Doing the dishes or trying to quiet the baby in the middle of the night, that men do but no one portrays that but the reality of it we all can relate to but we don't see that displayed, right? Whether you changing the diaper and getting poop all over your hands trying not to-

Bandon: Something we all been through

Luther: Using all 60 wipes on a three-wipe job.

Kevin: (laughs) don't let diarrhea hit the house.

Aaron: If there's not a lot of wipes involved you ain't wiping right.

Brandon: Wipe down, Hey man I'm half sleep, leave me alone (Laughs)

After fathers took a moment to joke around about the "joys" of changing dirty diapers, they discussed how media omits their active caretaking role in their children's lives. Luther

shared that he felt media did not show new fathers and their journeys on television, which was another oversight because fathers needed to be more hands on with their children. He reported:

> One thing they don't display is the, uh, role like of, of of a new father. And then balancing that out with a role of a new mother. Look both of you don't know how to be a no father or a no mother because messing with them little baby dolls and having some smiling kids for the weekend is not good, that's not enough training. And, uh, then a lot of the times we-, men in a certain situation with kids I'm kind of hands off you know. That's your department. My department is over here I can't deal with them like that you know how to better handle them that way or mold them or shape them a little bit better, but the hands-on part of the men with the kids and so forth, because a lot of us are too passive. We need to be more assertive in our kid's life and things like that.

This conversation prompted another father to share that he thought media intentionally leaves out Black fathers' active role to reaffirm the negative current narrative of a Black father. Aaron said:

> I think the part like the media probably leaves it out too is so they always make it a point to say how bad a kid was or how negatively affected they were when their father wasn't there but they never make it a point to do some type of survey or something to say, "Oh these kids were wonderful because they had fathers in their lives." Whatever the dad did whether he was a cotton picker or didn't do things all day he was still a dad. You know what I'm saying? The thought that knowing your father was better than not knowing him at all. Right? It's whatever.

From the participants perspectives, many aspects were missing from the wide range of roles Black fathers performed. Cameron summed up these opinions across all three focus groups

by suggesting that there just needed to be more positive images of Black fathers and their children. He said:

> Yeah. Um ... I- I just think there could be more of just, us as a whole, as Black men and fathers on TV, on how we portray our lives in all aspects and just being there for our children no matter if we're married or not married. I just think there could be, just more portrayed on just how we are as Black men, as, you know, as Latino men, as, you know, it's, I think there just needs to be more in, in general on TV rather than the ma- the majority norm.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Acknowledging the critical role fathers play in child development, research has begun to examine contextual factors that influence fathers' engagement, such as their depictions in the media. Still, fathers of color—in particular African American fathers—are typically only studied in relation to their income and residential status. This reinforces the deficit-based narrative generated by outsiders, which has labeled Black fathers as absent. Embedded within media's representation of Black fathers, this current narrative driven by outsiders continues to neglect the very voices of those fathers, who challenge the distorted images that imply that they are "absent" and "deadbeats." In reality, as research and scholarship has begun to indicate that these fathers are very active within their families, with their children, and in their communities. Yet, little progression has been made in the broader ways that Black fathers are studied or portrayed in the media.

The purpose of this study was to explore the messages that African American fathers received about themselves through broadcasted televised media, identify influential factors that have impacted their fatherly roles, and highlight what Black fathers wished media would portray

about their fatherhood experiences. Through exploring these questions, this study sought to examine African American fathers through a fresh lens, providing them with the opportunity to speak openly about their fatherhood experiences. In addition, this study aimed to analyze the ways that Black fathers have negotiated who they truly are as opposed to the narrative that outsiders have perpetuated.

In each focus group, participants established community and took ownership of the semi-structured research process, using their own voices to lead the course of the conversations. Nearly all of the fathers placed race at the center of their shared personal experiences, perspectives, and the strategies that they used to help make sense of contradictory realities that they consistently face. Aligning closely with the critical race theory (Bells, 1980), fathers acknowledged that race, oppression, and power structures have had a large influence on the narratives that have been placed on Black fathers. For example, they shared that positive portrayals of Black fathers are less likely to be displayed on television, with the exception of advertisement, and negative or stereotypical images of Black fathers are more likely to be shown on television. Fathers were adamant that positive portrayals of Black fathers were rarely on television as a direct result of the deeply-rooted racism and biases in the U.S. Yet, many of fathers still discussed their attempts to combat the misconception of Black fatherhood by doing all that they could within their homes and communities, serving as a counter narrative. A theme that supported this notion was that Black fathers felt that there were other key factors beyond television that impacted their fatherly roles, specifically because media did not provide a complete picture of Black fatherhood. In addressing this theme, fathers shared the importance of social fathering and the ways that Black communities still adopt the "it takes a village" mentality by leaning into each other's lives.

This notion has parallels to Vygotsky's theory surrounding the wealth of knowledge that individuals attain within their own homes and communities (Vygotsky, 1978).

One major take-away from this study was that Black fathers are present and very active in their children's lives. This continues to hold true in spite of what outsiders believe. Participants' descriptions of their active engagement with their young children closely aligns with some previous scholarship, spotlighting the high levels of involvement among Black fathers (Jones & Mosher, 2013; Leavell et al., 2011). For instance, this current study supports Leavell et al. (2011) results, which demonstrate the high level of engagement that African American fathers have with their preschool children. The Black fathers in Leavell's et al. (2011) study were much more engaged in caregiving tasks, play, and visiting activities with their children compared to Latino and White fathers. While the current study did not employ a cross comparison analysis with other racially diverse fathers, participants responses still aligned with previous reports surrounding the active role that Black fathers play in their children's lives as caregivers (Leavell et al, 2011). The findings from this study also supported the results reported by Reynold (2009) which highlighted the responsibility, connection, and drive that Black fathers have to be present in their children's lives and the communities in which their children are raised. In addition to commitment to being there for their children, several fathers in the present study discussed the active roles they played in their communities including serving as organizers, social fathers, and role models within their communities. This closely aligns with several fathers' stories presented by Reynold about being active in various community and health initiatives.

Several fathers across all three groups also discussed factors that serve as systematic barriers for the Black community, and especially Black fathers. They pushed back on the notion that all African American fathers are absent, by openly stating that such a notion is outright false.

At the same time, several participants identified historic and current policies and practices that they felt contributed to a subset of Black fathers who were actually not present in their children's lives. They identified mass incarceration, welfare reform, policing, and the war on drugs as policies that have had direct negative impacts on Black fathers. The United States of America still has the highest imprisonment rate in the world and mass incarceration continues to disproportionately impact Black fathers. Racial profiling, policing, and policies surrounding "War on Drugs" and "Stop and Frisk" have expanded, leading to unjust systems using new grounds to incarcerate African America fathers. African American fathers are now being jailed for simply existing in certain spaces, such as public establishments. In addition, the crisis surrounding innocent Black fathers unjustly killed at the hands of law enforcement continues to be on the raise, yet has been dismissed as a local matter. While 2018 police violence data are still being collected, mappingpoliceviolence.org indicates that 352 individuals have been killed at the hands of law enforcement, and historically African Americans have been three times more likely than their White counterparts to be killed. Since the start of the data collection process for this study, numerous innocent African American fathers have been killed by law enforcement. One of these is Stephon Clark, a 22-year old father of two who was shot eight times in the back at his grandparents' house by two police officers who assumed this young unarmed innocent father was breaking into cars. Similar to the countless other cases, Mr. Clark's two young children are now forced to grow up without their father. The absence of Mr. Clark is not a result of him being a "deadbeat" Black father who neglected his responsibilities. Rather, it is due to a system that continues to perpetuate inequities within U.S. society by taking Black fathers' lives without any recourse or true repercussions.

Furthermore, recent racial hoaxes have begun to increase, as has the use of policing, which is negatively affecting the African American community as this population continues to be criminalized. For instance, Shanna Swearingen, an elementary school principal, threatened to call the police and lie about one of her African American special needs students because he was a runner and she refused to chase him. She stated "We won't chase him. We will call the police and tell them he has a gun so they can come faster (KPRC-TV)." Many participants in the group referred to tension between law enforcement and the African American community. Some fathers attributed the inequalities in the justice system to the lack of interaction that many police officers have had with the Black community, other than what they have seen on television. With police officers' mentality to shoot African American individuals first and ask questions later, the implications of racial hoaxes are detrimental to the Black family, and has contributed to some of the absent fathers within the African American family. Nonetheless, the implications of policies, policing, and inequities continue to go unstudied in relation to outsiders' notions of the absent Black father.

Finally, the current recourse for White communities who are facing substance abuse looks very different from the severe measures taken during the war on drugs within the Black community. Fathers in this study mentioned the crack epidemic being placed in Black communities and the unjust ways that Black men were more harshly punished for the same crimes committed by White men. Participants also mentioned the impact that these actions have on Black families as men were locked up, in comparison to recent epidemics in White communities where incarceration is not the resolution.

Throughout the study, participants were adamant about being present for their children and often felt confident enough to speak on behalf of several other Black fathers whom they

knew. They were not the absent Black fathers that media portrayed, and some described the implications of the distorted images. Using Trayvon Martin as an example, a few fathers discussed the consequences of being presented as someone they were not. Participants explicitly addressed ways that such deficit-based images impact outsiders' view of them, again providing substantiating examples of policing disparities. Most fathers' contentions closely aligned with the two-step flow theory of media-effects; they believed that negative depictions of them were a result of the opinions of leaders and those who controlled media (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948).

Participants also shared specific techniques that they have used to ensure that they were consuming palatable images of Black fathers. Fathers' reports demonstrated the ways that they critically evaluated media and strategically decided whether it aligned with their current values. While many fathers reported not allowing media to impact their fatherly roles, it was clear that fathers had high levels of media literacy and employed a variety of techniques to filter what media they and their children consumed.

Recognizing that media was conveying incomplete portraits of Black fatherhood, these men were deliberate about ensuring that their children were getting counter-narratives through their individual interactions. Although they did identify some positive television shows and movies that portrayed positive Black fathers, some still felt that even those shows' depictions did not capture the extent of how involved Black men are in general household tasks. For instance, while some fathers identified *Blackish* as a positive Black father television show, others criticized the lack of support and active role that the Black father in that program had in relation to household tasks. These participants thought the father should not have been the one falling apart after his wife just had their child; he should have been more engaged in household tasks to support her.

Finally, this study characterized individual fatherhood experiences to contest the one-size-fits all negative narrative that has been given about Black fathers. In spite of these findings not being generalizable to the entire Black father population, it did reveal a commonality among many of the participating Black fathers who are challenging the mainstream narrative about Black men. While this topic continues to be understudied in the academic research, Black fathers have been intentional about creating their own counter narratives. One effective tool is social media. For example, Beleaf in Fatherhood, a Hip-Hop artist who uses the internet and social media to counter the false narrative about Black fathers is shown in an infamous YouTube video clip teaching his son about the false narrative given to Black fathers and the ways that his son will have to overcome it in the future. Essentially, he is demonstrating how he negotiates who he is versus how society has labeled him. He says:

> … See if you let them tell it, I'm just a figment of your imagination, I am not even really here. But you'll never know that because everything that I do from now on will change the narrative. And so will you, we will be the difference, it will change the rules, we will set a higher standard. They say Black fathers are not around, they know if they create that to be true we'll believe it. So, we have no choice but flood culture with the images of Black fathers being around, Black fathers being there, Black fathers being present. I will do that for you and you will do that for your sons and daughters. Because you are a gift, and when they say Black fathers don't exist, I want you to speak up to that, I want you to tell them your experiences. Cause we have to clear the path for those who come after us. Family is the most important thing we have. Now you know papa ain't perfect but you will always see me apologize, you will always see me try, and I will never give up on this family. Do you understand? *Child's voice*: Yes, I understand Papa!

Many of Beleaf in Fatherhood's words, encouragement, and desire to counter the current absent Black father narrative mirrored participants' aspirations. While this study explored several topics that Beleaf in Fatherhood discussed in his three-minute video, the findings around media and outsiders were well-aligned with his statement, "They say Black fathers are not around. They know if they create that to be true we'll believe it." In this study, fathers emphasized that they are present and active, and it is time for more outsiders to understand and honor insiders' perspectives. This study is one small step in that direction!

Limitations

As with all research studies, the results must be understood with some limitations in mind. While the 13 fathers willingly volunteered to participate in the focus groups, one group of fathers was recruited from an early childhood program. This specific subset of fathers had a strong rapport with their children and the school, and many of them reported dropping off and picking up their children from school on a daily basis. Selecting fathers who were clearly active could have influenced how engaged they were in other caregiving tasks. This presents the question of whether the responses of fathers who are not as engaged in their children's school activities would vary from the current participants. As an African American woman, my positionality could be seen as another limitation in this study. Finally, the sample size used in this study could be considered a limitation. Yet, the small size allowed for a deeper examination of a subset of Black fathers' child rearing experiences. Recognizing that all Black fathers are not identical, it is critical to learn the individual stories of many Black fathers. Therefore, it would be beneficial to extend this study with a larger sample size of fathers over a longer span of time.

In spite of these limitations, this study addressed several knowledge gaps about African American fathers. Focusing on the participants' personal fatherhood experiences provided

opportunities for them to discuss specific topics that were significant to their practices, to discuss their strengths, and to celebrate the ways that they are engaged with their young children. This study intentionally de-emphasized residential and economic statuses to encourage fathers to focus on what fathers were doing "right" instead of what they were doing "wrong." Finally, in lieu of approaching these fathers with a "fix it" mentality and an objective of shifting their fathering practices to align with those of mainstream fathers, this study approachedthese Black fathers' habits of being as the fatherhood norm for them.

Conclusion

This research moves the conversation of African American fathers beyond a deficit-based viewpoint, embracing the participants' voices as an insider's perspective into Black fatherhood. Furthermore, it focuses on and supports fathers' lived experiences as a means to creating their own fatherhood norm instead of conceding to the distorted images that outsiders have placed on them. Learning directly from African American fathers about their roles provides much more reliable and nuanced depictions of their engagement with their young children. These findings have several implications for future practices and policies.

Early Childhood Practices

First, it is critical for early childhood providers and other school officials to explore the ways that they access information about African American fathers. Providers should more deeply explore the ways that they learn about Black men and how Black fathers in their programs view their fatherly roles. This exploration is particularly important given the distorted incomplete images of Black fathers presented by mainstream narratives. Negative images of Black fathers can directly impact the ways that providers and school officials attempt to connect with these men and restrict the rapport or value that providers place on Black fathers as parents.

In the present study, some fathers felt excluded from social programs such as WIC clinics and school activities. Fathers were clear about their desire to participate in their children's school but reported feeling like they were misunderstood or that the current depictions of them complicated their involvement. In other words, for some fathers, being misunderstood was a barrier that hindered them feeling welcomed in their child's school. As a result, it is critical for school officials to challenge the traditional ways that they have accessed information about Black fathers and begin to implement new avenues to engage these fathers based on their norms instead of comparing them to White fathers. Engaging in such practices can afford providers with the opportunity to strengthen their home to school connections by gaining insight about Black fathers, specifically from them. Programs can learn more about the Black fathers whom they serve by inviting them to participate more often and attempt to build community based on their interests. Instead of relying on outside sources to learn about Black fatherhood, providers should engage these men through surveys and connect with them via parent nights and other father friendly community environments. Schools and providers can be intentional by reaching out to other programs who have been successful in this area. In addition, providers can broaden their scope by looking at other sources of media to explore Black fatherhood. For example, unlike broadcasted television, social media allows people to share their personal lived stories. In other words, individuals have more control over their own narrative and providers can see just how active Black fathers are in their children's lives.

Also, it is important for early childhood providers and school professionals to engage in some form of reflective supervision that elicits thoughtful reflections of the messages that they are receiving from broadcasted television and the implications that they may have on their interactions with Black fathers. Questions should be asked about how staff are learning about

Black fathers and where are they accessing such information or images. If providers' main source of information about Black fathers is televised media, agencies should explore how restricted images may impact their ability to create equitable environments. Early childhood programs should also expand their self-assessment to think about the implications of unconscious biases and the ways that it impacts how their staff interact with African American fathers. In addition, programs should consider the importance of staff representation and aim to establish inclusive practices in their protocols and procedures. For instance, programs should seek to answer questions about their status quo and who is allowed to challenge it. Finally, programs should have ongoing conversations surrounding equitable practices for fathers and start to look at innovative ways to challenge any distorted images that they may be receiving. This could be done through using a research-based fatherhood comic as a part of providers' professional development plan, as a means to elicit additional fatherhood discussion within the community, or in classroom spaces as a literacy activity for children. Using resources like the *Black Fatherhood: This is Who We Are* comic (Appendix G), which was generated directly from the voices of African American fathers, can serve as a foundational piece when learning more about Black fathers.

Policies

Over $650 million dollars have been invested in numerous federal programs under the Administration for Children and Families division, including: Welfare to Work, the Healthy Marriage Initiative and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative, Deficit Reduction Act, and the Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Innovation Fund. Though efforts to strengthen fatherhood and families have typically been jointly discussed, two models have traditionally been implemented: marriage and relationship programs, and responsible fatherhood programs. In

Knox, Cowan, Cowan, and Bildner (2011), a review of the program's effectiveness addressed the differences between each program's foundation, objectives, and practices. The marriage and relationship model was established by researchers who were interested in exploring effective practices that strengthen relationships, while responsible fatherhood programs stemmed from government officials who sought to increase economic self-sufficiency and child support compliance amongst low-income fathers. Subsequently, responsible fatherhood programs were targeted interventions for nonresidential low-income fathers, designed to increase their employment, knowledge surrounding parenting, ability to pay child support, and understanding of legal visitation rights. When exploring both models, there continues to be a large gap that neglects the severe inequalities that fathers of color face beyond income and residential statuses. The present study, addresses this knowledge gap by noting the unique challenges African American fathers face surrounding discrimination, inequality, distorted narratives, and mass incarceration. As reported by some fathers in the group, the double standards found within the justice system and the inequitable practices of mass incarceration have directly impacted their ability to participate within their child's school regardless of whether the father actually committed the crime or not. Recognizing that mass incarceration negatively impacts the African American community at more than double the rate, it is important for schools to revisit a number of their current policies that hinder these men's abilities to volunteer within their children's schools. For example, the popular Watch D.O.G.S. program that many schools across the country require fathers to complete a background check, which ultimately hinders certain fathers from being involved (National Center for fathering).

In addition, when funding future programs for African American fathers, more research should be done to gain a better understanding of what would be most helpful for them as they are

navigating their roles as Black fathers. Not all African American fathers are low-income so there is a large population that current fatherhood programs are neglecting. When reevaluating the current policies and the current two program models, it is important to recognize the diversity of African American fathers. In other words, additional programs should be created to support the full spectrum of Black fathers based on their unique needs.

Finally, it is important for broadcasted televised media to expand its measures beyond viewership and to analyze the impact that its depictions have on specific communities and professions. These efforts should include cross-media collaboration so, for example, broadcasted televised media may gain insights from social media. Furthermore, having producers and other television executives collaborate with communities, researchers, policy makers, and practitioners may generate more complete and constructive profiles of Black fatherhood in the media.

References

Alexander, M. (2010). *The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New York State: The New Press.

A/Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. (2014). The State of Western Australia's Children and Young People, Edition Two, pp. 140

Banks, J., Au, K. H., Ball, A. F., Bell, P., Gordon, E. W., Guiterrez, K., Heath, S. B., Lee, C, D., Lee, Y., Mahiri, J., Nasir, N.S., Valdes, G. & Zhou, M. (2007). *Learning in and out of school in diverse environments: Life-long, Life-wide, Life-deep.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington Center for Multicultural Education and The LIFE Center.

Barbarin, O., Cabrera, N., & Rogoff, B. (2017). Supporting parents from diverse backgrounds: lessons from the national academies report on families of young children. SRCD 4/8/2017

Barbour, R. (2007). *Doing focus groups* (Sage qualitative research kit). Los Angeles [CA] ; London: SAGE.

Baskerville, S. (2004). Is there really a fatherhood crisis? *The Independent Review,8*(4), 485-508.

Bethea, P. D. (1995). African American women and the male-female relationship dilemma: A counseling perspective. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development,* 23, p.86-95

Bloor, M. (2001). *Focus groups in social research* (Introducing qualitative methods). Thousand Oaks, CA.: SAGE Publications.

Brown, S. (2014, August 25). CDC study shatters myth about Black fathers. *The Louisiana Weekly*, p. 1,7.

Brown, S. (2014, November 18). The untold story of Black Fatherhood. *Colorlines.* *https://www.colorlines.com/articles/untold-story-black-fatherhood*

Caldwell, C. H., Bell, L. B., Cassandra L., Ward, J. D., & Jennings, C. (2011). Engaging nonresident African American fathers in intervention Research: what practitioners should know about parental monitoring in nonresident families. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 21(3), 298-307.

Cazenave, N. (1979). Middle-Income Black Fathers: An Analysis of the Provider Role. *The Family Coordinator*, *28*(4), 583-593.

Clark, K. B. , & Clark, M. P. (1940). Skin color as a factor in racial identification of Negro preschool children. *Journal of Social Psychology,* S.P.SS.SI. Bulletin, II, 11()159-169.

Clinton, W. J. (1995, October 16). Racism in the United States. Speech. Retrieved March 7, 2017, from http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/clinton-racism-in-the-united-states-speech-text/#top [52]

Coates, T. (2015). Between the world and me. New York: Spiegel & Grau.

Coates, T. (2015). The Black family in the age of mass incarceration. *The Atlantic*, *316*(3), 60-80,82-84.

Coles, R., & Green, C. (2010). *The myth of the missing black father*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Collins, P.H. (2005). *Black women and motherhood* (Motherhood and Space). New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Connor, M., & White, J. (2007). Fatherhood in contemporary Black America: An Invisible Presence. *The Black Scholar,37*(2), 2-8.

Cowan, Phillip A., Cowan, Carolyn Pape, & Knox, Virginia. (2010). Marriage and fatherhood

programs. *Future of Children, 20*(2), 205-230.

Delamont, S. (2012). *Handbook of qualitative research in education*. Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar.

Delgado, R., (2012). *Critical race theory: an introduction*. Critical America (2nd ed.). New York University Press.

Delgado, R; Stefancic, Jean (1993). "Critical race theory: an annotated bibliography". *Virginia Law Review*. 79 (2): 461–516

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, Jean. (2013). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge* (3rd ed.). Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press.

Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y. (2003) The landscape of qualitative research: theories and issues. (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

De Lepeleere, S., Desmet, A., Verloigne, M., Cardon, G., & De Bourdeaudhuij, I. (2013). What practices do parents perceive as effective or ineffective in promoting a healthy diet, physical activity, and less sitting in children: Parent focus groups. *BMC Public Health, 13*(1)

Diuguid, L., & Rivers, A. (2000). The media and the Black response. *The annals of the American academy of political and social science, 569*, 120-134. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/stable/1048814

Duminica, D., & Popescu, G. (2012). The relationship between media and violence. *Revista De Stiinte Politice*, (35), 421-428.

Edwards, B. (2016). *How social media is helping to change the image of young black dads*. Retrieved from https://www.theroot.com/how-social-media-is-helping-to-change-the-image-of-youn-1790855709

Embrick, D. (2015). Two nations, revisited: The lynching of Black and Brown bodies, police brutality, and racial control in 'post-racial' Amerikkka. *Critical Sociology, 41*(6), 835-843.

Fagan, J., & Barnett, M. (2003). The relationship between maternal gatekeeping, paternal competence, mothers' attitudes about the father role, and father involvement. *Journal of Family Issues*, 24, 1020-1043

Frank, T., Keown, J., Dittman, L., & Sanders, C. (2015). Using father preference data to increase father engagement in evidence-based parenting programs. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 24*(4), 937-947.

Frost, P., Casey, B., Griffin, K., Raymundo, L., Farrell, C., & Carrigan, R. (2015). The influence of confirmation bias on memory and source monitoring. *The Journal of General Psychology, 142*(4), 238-252.

Fleck, M., Hudson, D., Abbott, D., & Reisbig, A. (2013). You can't put a dollar amount on presence: Young, non-resident, low-income, African American fathers. *Issues in Comprehensive Pediatric Nursing, 36*(3), 225-40.

Gadsden, V., Wortham, S., & Turner, H. (2003). Situated identities of young, African American fathers in low-income settings. *Family Court Review, 41*(3), 381-399.

Greenawalt, K. (2014). Probabilities, perceptions, consequences and "discrimination": One puzzle about controversial "stop and frisk". *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law, 12*(1), 181-193.

Gillum, T. (2002). Exploring the link between stereotypic images and intimate partner violence in the African American Community. *Violence Against Women, 8*(1), 64-86.

Harpalani, V., Qadafi, A. K.., Spencer, M. B. (2013). Doll studies. In P. L. Mason (Ed.),

*Encyclopedia of Race and Racism, (*2nd Ed), 67-70. Detroit: Cengage.

Harmsen, I., Mollema, L., Ruiter, R., Paulussen, T., De Melker, H., & Kok, G. (2013). Why parents refuse childhood vaccination: A qualitative study using online focus groups. *BMC Public Health, 13*, 1183.

Heinberg, L., & Thompson, J. (1995) Body image and televised images of thinness and attractiveness: A controlled laboratory investigation. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 14, 325-339

Jayakody, R. & Kalil, A. (2002), Social fathering in low-income, African American families with preschool children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64: 504–516. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00504.

Johnson-Ahorlu, R., N. (2012). The academic opportunity gap: how racism and stereotypes disrupt the education of African American Undergraduates. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 15*(5), 633-652.

Johnson, M., & Young, A. (2016). Diversity and meaning in the study of Black fatherhood. *13*(1), 5-23.

Jones, J., & Mosher, W. (2013). Fathers' involvement with their children: United States, 2006-2010. *National Health Statistics Reports*, (71), 1.

Jordan-Zachery, J. (2009). Making fathers: Black men's response to fatherhood initiatives. *Journal of African American Studies, 13*(3), 199-218.

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 72*(12), 2954-2965.

King, T. (2015). Parenting in the Black community: why raising children is sifferent for us

Atlanta Black Star, July 2015. http://atlantablackstar.com/2015/07/14/psychology-parenting-exploring-new-ideas-black-motherhood-fatherhood/ Accessed Feb. 2, 2018

Lamb, M. E. (2000). The history of research on father involvement: An overview. *Marriage & Family Review, 29*(2-3), 23-42.

Livingston, J. N., & McAdoo, J. L. (2007). The roles of African American fathers in the socialization of their children. In *Black Families* (pp. 219-237). SAGE Publications.

Löwstedt, A., & Mboti, N. (2017). Media racism: Beyond modernity and postmodernity. *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics, 13*(1-2), 111-130.

Lynch, E & Hanson, M., Ed. (2011). *Developing Cross-Cultural Competence: A Guide for Working with Children and Their Families. Fourth Edition*. Brookes Publishing Company.

Marks, D., & Yardley, Lucy. (2004). *Research methods for clinical and health psychology*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE.

Martin, J. L. (2014). Critical race theory, hip hop, and "Huck Finn": narrative inquiry in a high school English classroom. *Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public Education, 46*(2), 244-267.

Mastro, D., & Tropp, L. (2004). The effects of interracial contact, attitudes, and stereotypical portrayals on evaluations of black television sitcom characters. *Communication Research Reports, 21*(2), 119-129.

McAdoo, H. (2007). *Black families* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

McAdoo, J. (1997). The roles of African American fathers in the socialization of their Children. *In Black Families (3rd ed.)* (pp. 183-197)

Metzler, C., Sanders, M., Rusby, J., & Crowley, R. (2012). Using consumer preference information to increase the reach and impact of media-based parenting interventions in a public health approach to parenting support. *Behavior Therapy, 43*(2), 257-270.

Merton, R. (1972). Insiders and outsiders: A chapter in the sociology of knowledge. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*(1), 9-47.

Mitchell, O., & Caudy, M. (2015). Examining racial disparities in drug arrests. *Justice Quarterly, 32*(2), 288-313.

Moore, S., Adedoyin, A., Brooks, M., Robinson, M., Harmon, D., & Boamah, D. (2017). Black males living in an antithetical police culture: keys for their survival. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 26*(8), 902-919.

Moton, J. (2016). African-American men suit up to fight stereotypes. *University Wire*, Oct 4, 2017.

Morawska, A., Sanders, M., Goadby, E., Headley, C., Hodge, L., McAuliffe, C., . . . Anderson, E. (2011). Is the triple p-positive parenting program acceptable to parents from culturally diverse backgrounds? *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 20*(5), 614-622.

Morgan, D. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed., Qualitative research methods; v. 16). Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Publications.

Morrison, C., & Trimble, J. (2017). Still work to be done: The million man march and the 50th anniversary commemoration Selma to Montgomery march as mythoform and visual rhetoric. *Howard Journal of Communications, 28*(2), 132-143.

Murray, F., & Hwang, S. H. (2015). Perceived father roles of married African American men: A phenomenological study. *Qualitative Report,* 20(8), 1185-1204.

Mutua, M. (2000). Critical race theory and international law: The view of an insider-outsider.

Villanova Law Review, 45(5), 841-853.

NAACP (n.d.). Criminal justice fact sheet. Retrieved from http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet

Nowell, L., Norris, J., White, D., & Moules, N. (2017). Thematic analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1),

Parker, L., Deyhle, D., Villenas, S., & Nebeker, K. (1998). Guest editors' introduction: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*(1), 5-6.

Pawlowski, C., Tjornhoj-Thomsen, T., Schipperijn, J., & Troelsen, J. (2014). Barriers for recess physical activity: A gender specific qualitative focus group exploration. *BMC Public Health, 14*, 639.

Powell-Hopson, D., & Hopson, D. (1988). Implications of doll color preferences among Black preschool children and White preschool children. *Journal of Black Psychology,14*(2), 57-63.

Reckley, R. (2001). The myth and the reality: Father-son relationships in the black family. *Bookbird, 39*(2), 34-36.

Reynolds, T. (2009). Exploring the Absent/Present Dilemma: Black Fathers, Family Relationships, and Social Capital in Britain. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 624*, 12-28.

Roy, K. (1999). Low-income single fathers in an African American community and the requirements of welfare reform. *Journal of Family Issues, 20*(4), 432-457.

Stenhammar, C., Wells, M., Åhman, A., Wettergren, B., Edlund, B., & Sarkadi, A. (2012).

'Children are exposed to temptation all the time'– parents' lifestyle-related discussions in focus groups. *Acta Paediatrica, 101*(2), 208-215.

Smith, C., Krohn, M., Chu, R., Best, O. (2005) African American fathers: Myths and realities about their involvement with their firstborn children. *Journal of Family Issues.* 26(7): 975–1001.

Texeira, E. (2006). Black men quietly combating stereotypes. Washington Post, July 1. http://www.washingtonpost.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/01/AR2006070100462.html Accessed Oct. 1, 2017

Threlfall, J., Seay, K., & Kohl, P. (2013). The parenting role of African American fathers in the context of urban poverty. *Journal of Children & Poverty*, *19*(1), 45–61.

Topos P., Kerschhagel. (2011). Opportunity for Black men and boys. Washington Post, July http://www.washingtonpost.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/01/AR2006070100462.html Accessed Oct. 1, 2017

What Is Critical Race Theory?". UCLA School of Public Affairs. Retrieved 11 September 2017.

Welch, K. (2007). Black criminal stereotypes and racial profiling. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 23*(3), 276-288.

Western, B., & Wildeman, C. (2009). The Black family and mass incarceration. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 621*, 221.

Wilcox, & Laird. (2000). The impact of media images of super-slender women on women's self-esteem: identification, social comparison, and self-perception. *Journal of Research in Personality, 34*(2), 278-286.

Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 8*(1), 69-91.

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Fliers

DADS…

WE NEED YOUR VOICE!!!

What are the images in popular televised media about Black fathers? How are fathers portrayed?

Join the conversation by participating in our study, we ***need*** to hear directly from you!!!

FATHERS MUST:

1. IDENTIFY AS AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK
2. HAVE A YOUNG CHILD (BIRTH TO AGE 5) OR EXPECTING A CHILD

WHAT IF I DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE?

1. You will be asked to attend one 2-hour Focus Group with other black fathers
2. During the focus group, you will be asked questions regarding media's portrayal of African American fathers

Fathers who complete the focus group will receive a $40.00 Gift Card….

For more information, please contact Lindsey Wilson at wilsonl9@uw.edu or complete the *"Interested in learning more contact form"* attached.

APPENDIX B

Father Contact Form

A Collaborative Effort Toward Social Change: Understanding Media's Influence on African American Fathers

□ **(For Fathers)** I am interested in learning more about the opportunity to participate in the focus group.

I prefer to be contacted via:

□ a telephone call
□ a text message (telephone text message)
□ Email

□ **(For Mothers)** I believe my partner/ husband may be interested in learning more about the opportunity to participate in a focus group.

Father's name: _____

Father's home phone number: _____

Father's cell phone number: _____

Father's Email: _____

The best times to reach the father of the household:
_____

*If you have any questions please feel free to email Lindsey Wilson at wilsonl9@uw.edu or call **206-317-9172**

APPENDIX C
Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

A Collaborative Effort Towards Social Change: Understanding Media's Influence on African American Fathers

Researcher: Lindsey Wilson
wilsonl9@uw.edu
206-317-9172

Faculty Advisor: Holly Schindler
hscindl@uw.edu
206.616.0853

RESEARCHER'S STATEMENT

You are invited to partake in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you all the information that you will need to help you decide whether or not to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." We will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

We are conducting research to address a knowledge gap within the fatherhood field specifically relating to the representation of African American fathers. We are seeking to understand how televised media depictions of African American men influence their understandings of fathering, and what they believe they have to offer their young children (infant or toddler).

PROCEDURES

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be in a group with approximately 4-6 other African American fathers. The one-time focus group will also include a moderator who will guide the discussion by asking specific questions, and note-takers to write down the ideas expressed within the group. If you choose to be a part of this study, you will be asked some questions relating to the portrayal of African American fathers within the media, your personal experiences as an African American father, and whether media's narratives are helpful or harmful to your understanding of your fatherly role. As this study is seeking to understand your personal experiences there is no "right" or "wrong" answers to the posed questions. All perspectives are essential to this study.

With your permission, we will audio record the focus group only to ensure the accuracy of the gathered data. We will then transcribe the recording without any identifiable information and destroy the recording 1 year after the study is complete. Only the research team will have access to the recording, which will be kept in a secure location.

Below I have provided an example of one of the questions that will be asked during the focus group.

1. Describe a memory you have of the way media portrayed African American Fathers?

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. I have addressed concerns for your privacy below. Some people feel self-conscious when notes are taken or discussions are recorded. It is important to note your participation in this study is no way linked to your membership within your community organization and you do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

You may not directly benefit from taking part in this research study. One benefit of this study is to address a knowledge gap in the fatherhood research field by increasing the data amongst African American fathers. Gathering perspectives, meanings, and input is essential as data can be informative to programs, policies, and other initiatives striving to be inclusive and/or reach fathers of color.

SOURCE OF FUNDING

This study is being funded through the University of Washington's Department of Communication's Center for Communication, Difference, and Equity.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

All of your data will be handled as confidentially as possible. All information will be coded so that it cannot be connected with any individual or family. Identifying information needed for participant contact such as names, address, and telephone numbers, will be kept in locked file cabinets and our limited-access participant database. This database will be destroyed 1 year after data collection is completed. No names or other identifying information will ever be used in publications or presentations. While there is a minimal chance that information you provide could be inadvertently seen by someone outside the research team, we will take careful precautions to prevent this from happening.

OTHER INFORMATION

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Information about you is confidential. I will assign you a pseudonym and code the study information. I will keep the link between your name and the pseudonym code in a separate, secured location until the study is complete. Then I will destroy the information linking your information to the pseudonym. You will be compensated with a $40.00 gift card for participating in and completing the study.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be

examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk or harm.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact Lindsey Wilson at the telephone number or email listed at the top of this form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098.

_____

Signature of investigator Printed Name Date

Participant's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later on about the research, I can ask the investigator listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

____ I give permission for the researcher to re-contact me to clarify information.
____ I do NOT give permission for the researcher to re-contact me to clarify information.

_____

Signature of participant Printed Name Date

Copies to: Investigators' file
Participant

APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Research Questions:

(1) What messages do African American fathers receive about themselves through televised media?

(2) In what ways do these messages influence African American fathers' understanding of their fatherly role?

(3) How do these messages influence what they believe they can offer to their young children?

	Main question	***Sub question(s)***
1.	Please share your name and one thing that you love or surprised you about fatherhood?	
2.	In front of you there is an envelope with four pictures of African American fathers. 1. Thinking about media's coverage (Television shows, news, movies, sitcoms etc.) take the pictures out of the envelope and based on what you see on TV sort the black fathers in order from (1 - 4). The first photo should represent the image you feel is most likely to be seen on television and the fourth photo is an image that you feel is least likely to be found on TV. (RQ:1)	a) Who can share their order of pictures? b) **Participant A:** Tell me more about why you chose that pictures? c) Did anyone else select that picture as their first photo & Why? d) **Participant B:** Can you relate to what **Participant C** said about the 1st picture? How has your experience been the same or Different? e) Now let's look at the 4th picture. How many of you chose_____ as the 4th photo? f) _____Can you share why you chose that photo?
3.	Describe the memories that you have of African American Fathers in the media?	a) How did this change who you are today as a father? Can you give an example? • For example, when the news reported that milk was connected to cancer a lot of people stopped drinking milk.

4.	Can you relate to the ways African American Fathers are portrayed on television? How so?	b) Are there ways that you don't relate to these fathers? c) What impact does that have on the ways you engage your children? Can you explain that in more detail?
5.	Based on what you know or have seen on TV, do you feel that media shows a complete picture of black fathers?	Do you think there is a particular story TV is trying to create about Black fathers? _____What do you think that story is? _____ Does that story help or harm Black Fathers?
6.	What are some aspects of African American fathers you believe are missing, that you would like to be shown on TV?	a) How is that different from the ways that they are currently represented? b) Is there anything else that I missed or you would like to add about black fathers and the media?
	That was my last question relating to media's portrayal of African American fathers. With that said, I did get a chance to work closely with the (the church; early learning center; community agency) and we came up with a couple of questions that will better inform the services that agency offer. So, we will transition into our last two questions which will be geared specifically towards _____.	
7.	Community Partner Question:	
8.	Community Partner Question:	

APPENDIX E

Provided Photos of Black fathers

Larry

Paul

William

Tyrone

APPENDIX F

Collaborative Effort Towards Social Change
Demographic Form
Father ID: _ _ _ _ _ _

Community Site: _____ Date: _____

1. How old are you? _____ (years)

2. Which of the following best describes your current main daily activities and/or responsibilities?

   A. Working full-time
   B. Working part-time
   C. Unemployed or laid off
   D. Looking for work
   E. Raising children full-time

3. What is the highest degree you earned?
   A. High school diploma or equivalency (GED)
   B. Associate degree (junior college)
   C. Bachelor's degree
   D. Master's degree
   E. Doctorate
   F. Other specify: _____
   G. None of the above (less than high school)

4. What best describes your relationship status?
   A. Married
   B. Separated
   C. Divorced
   D. Cohabiting, or living together
   E. Romantically involved, but living apart
   F. No relationship

5. What is your annual household income from all sources?
   A. Less than $15,000
   B. $15,000 to $29,000
   C. $30,000 to $44,000
   D. $45,000 to $59,000
   E. $60,000 to $74,000
   F. $75,000 or More

1. Please fill in the following information about each of your children:

	What is this child's birthday? *Month*	*Year*	**Which best describes this child's relationship to you?**			**Does this child live with you?**	
1.			***BIOLOGICAL***	***STEP***	***OTHER***	***YES***	***NO***
2.			***BIOLOGICAL***	***STEP***	***OTHER***	***YES***	***NO***
3			***BIOLOGICAL***	***STEP***	***OTHER***	***YES***	***NO***
4.			***BIOLOGICAL***	***STEP***	***OTHER***	***YES***	***NO***
5.			***BIOLOGICAL***	***STEP***	***OTHER***	***YES***	***NO***
6.			***BIOLOGICAL***	***STEP***	***OTHER***	***YES***	***NO***
7.			***BIOLOGICAL***	***STEP***	***OTHER***	***YES***	***NO***
8.			***BIOLOGICAL***	***STEP***	***OTHER***	***YES***	***NO***
9.			***BIOLOGICAL***	***STEP***	***OTHER***	***YES***	***NO***
10.			***BIOLOGICAL***	***STEP***	***OTHER***	***YES***	***NO***

8. Are you interested in being contacted for follow-up research in regards to this study?

a. Yes, please reach out to me if any additional questions need to be answered.

a. E-mail: _____

b. Telephone #: _____

1. No, I would prefer not to be contacted in regards to any additional questions

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING

APPENDIX G

Table 1. Summary of Fathers Responses

Pseudonym	Most likely to be on TV	Probably will be on TV	Maybe on TV	Will not be on TV
Malik	Paul	William	Larry	Tyrone
Cameron	William	Tyrone	Paul	Larry
David	Paul	Larry	Tyrone	William
Terrence	William	Paul	Tyrone	Larry
Jeremiah	William	Larry	Tyrone	Paul
Kevin	Paul	William	Larry	Tyrone
Brandon	William	Paul	Larry	Tyrone
Luther	Paul	Larry	Tyrone	William
Aaron	Paul	William	Larry	Tyrone
Rashaad	Paul	William	Larry	Tyrone
Zion	Paul	William	Larry	Tyrone
Wilber	William	Tyrone	Larry	Paul
Jaime	Paul	William	Larry	Tyrone

Table 2. Focus Group Participants' Demographics and Socioeconomic Status

Attribute		Frequencies

		N
Race/Ethnicity	Black/African-American	13
Highest Education	Less than High School High School/GED Associates Degree Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree	1 3 2 3 4
Annual Income	(-) 15,000 15,000-29,000 30,000-44,000 75,000 (+)	2 2 1 8
Current Employment Status	Unemployed/Laid Off/ Raising Child Full-Time Working Part-Time Working Full-Time	2 1 2 8
Highest Education	Less than High School High School/GED Associates Degree Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree	1 3 2 3 4
Relationship Status	No Relationship Divorced Living Together Married	1 1 3 8
Number of Children	One Child Two Children Three Children Four Children	3 7 2 1